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EXPLORING WHITE RACIAL IDENTITY AND ITS IMPACT ON PSYCHOTHERAPY AND PSYCHOTHERAPY ORGANISATIONS

Submitted by Judith Ryde

For the Degree of PhD

At the

THE UNIVERSITY OF BATH

2005

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Ph. D.

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I also wish to acknowledge my debt to Ben Okri whose poem Mental Fight I have used as chapter headings and in other places within the text. I used this poem as it repeatedly came to my mind as I wrote and then found that it spoke beautifully to each of my chapters. Maybe it is ironic, or maybe it is fitting, that, in writing a thesis about racialising whiteness, I should find inspiration in a poem written by someone who was born in Nigeria.

ABSTRACT

EXPLORING WHITE RACIAL IDENTITY AND ITS IMPACT ON PSYCHOTHERAPY AND PSYCHOTHERAPY ORGANISATIONS

PhD Thesis for the University of Bath

This thesis explores and examines my identity as a white psychotherapist within a racialised environment. In doing so I recognise the cultural power held by white people and that white people tend to regard themselves as culturally neutral. I explore the effect of these factors on myself, my practice, the psychotherapy profession and, to some extent, the wider society.

The thesis is in three parts, the first of which sets out the philosophical approach to my inquiry. The first chapter explores ontological and epistemological questions and the second sets out my methodology and shows how my inquiry and my thesis are valid.

The second part is a nuanced and detailed exploration of the experience of being white. I give an account of a co-operative inquiry with white psychotherapists and counsellors and show how this changed my own and other participants' perception of themselves within a racial context. I further explore guilt and shame in white people as this emerged as a particularly important theme.

The third part shows how my inquiry informs my practice as a psychotherapist. This includes, in chapter one, my work with individual clients where I explore the application of intersubjective psychotherapy to working across difference in culture as a white person. In chapter two I reflect on and act within the profession to improve sensitivity to cultural difference and diversity among practitioners, students and clients.

In conclusion this thesis contributes to the field by:

- demonstrating the ways in which intersubjective psychotherapy can be applied to working as a 'white' person in a diverse environment or across cultural boundaries.
- furthering an understanding of racism by showing how organising principles form and shape the way that we think.
- showing how an awareness of 'whiteness' is important within a racialised environment as well as the implications of this for the way I practice.

Over all this inquiry is a many layered and nuanced account of a journey that has led me into to a deeper and deeper understanding of 'white' as a privileged racial identity. This has had a significant affect on my practice and has led me to conclusions which are important for the good practice of 'white' psychotherapists, 'white' psychotherapy institutions and for awareness of 'whiteness' more generally within a racialised environment.

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APPENDICES:

EXPLORING WHITE RACIAL IDENTITY AND ITS IMPACT ON PSYCHOTHERAPY AND PSYCHOTHERAPY ORGANISATIONS

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Everyone loves a spring cleaning.
Lets have a humanity cleaning.
Open up history's chamber of horrors
And clear out the skeletons behind the mirrors,
Put our breeding nightmares to flight
Transform our monsters with our light.
Clear out the stables
In our celebrated fables
A giant cleaning is no mean undertaking.
A cleaning of progroms and fears
Of genocide and tears
Of future and slavery
Hatred and brutality.
Let's turn around and face them
The bullies that our pasts have become
Let's turn around and face them
Let's make this clearing-out moment
A legendary material atonement
From Mental Fight *by Ben Okri*

This thesis is about the implications of being racially white and a psychotherapist. Being a psychotherapist is part of my personhood, so inevitably this is about myself as a white person as well as myself as a white psychotherapist. Although the starting point of my inquiry is my own experience, I extend this to other's experience as well as to the psychotherapy profession as a whole.

In this chapter I introduce my inquiry, how it arose as a matter of interest for me and the emergent processes with which I engaged during its course, both before and during the writing.

I show the different arenas in which my inquiry took place as well as the kinds of questions that have arisen for me within the process of the inquiry. I introduce the themes and ideas on which my inquiry is built as well as the philosophical underpinnings of the work.

Finally I set out the scope and structure of the thesis by briefly describing each section and chapter.

Origins of the Thesis

I came to the Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice (CARPP) because it offered me an opportunity to be supported in exploring an aspect of my professional practice. Although I am a psychotherapist it appealed to me to do this academic work in a place which was not just for psychotherapists, particularly as I wanted to explore something about the interface that psychotherapy has with society. It was important to me to communicate beyond the world of psychotherapy as well as within it.

I chose action research because it seemed to me to be entirely consistent with the way I practise psychotherapy both in its value base and in its methodology. I understand the psychotherapeutic relationship to arise from the intersubjective space between therapist and client, thus seeing myself in the encounter as very much part of the 'field' (Stolorow, Atwood et al. 1994; Hycner and Jacobs 1995; Abram 1996; Orange, Atwood et al. 1997). This is also an important precept for myself as an action researcher, as researcher and subject are both seen as part of the same 'field' in action research epistemology (Gustavsen 2001). Both action research and intersubjective psychotherapy are, then, inquiries in which all parties are acknowledged to interact within an intersubjective field and the inquiry arises in the spaces between them.

My reflections on my practice as a psychotherapist led me to see that psychotherapy as a profession has very little diversity and I felt disturbed by this observation. Most professional members of psychotherapy organisations, as well as students, teaching staff and clients are white. I myself am white. Moreover, mainstream theories of psychotherapy do not attend to diverse cultural differences and experiences either. Psychotherapy theorising, both about theory and about practice, make assumptions based on white, western attitudes and values.

I therefore started this thesis with the following questions in mind:

- Why is the psychotherapy profession so lacking in diversity?
- Why do so few members of black and minority ethnic groups join the profession or come to psychotherapists for help?
- Why is that I, in particular, feel disturbed by this lack of diversity?
- Can psychotherapy practice change sufficiently to address the needs of those from black and minority groups?
- Can psychotherapy theorising about human development and psychological condition reflect sufficiently on its own assumptions to address human psychology across difference in culture?
- Can I and other psychotherapists become sufficiently aware of our own assumptions to address the needs of diverse clients groups?

So this thesis is about psychotherapy and whiteness, and, in particular, is about myself as a white person and as a white psychotherapist. In psychotherapy, as I understand and practice it (see below), the personhood of the psychotherapist cannot be separated from a professional persona, the two being inextricably connected. The thesis therefore focuses on two linked themes:

1. psychotherapy theory and practice in order to see how and whether it can address issues of whiteness in a diverse world, and
2. on the meaning of being racially white for myself and for others in the context of psychotherapy.

I strive to understand my own and others' place in global society as 'racially white' as well as my own place as a psychotherapist in a racially diverse world. This leads me to understand how that affects my practice as a psychotherapist. It also has wide reaching implications for psychotherapy as a whole.

As my inquiry progressed I noticed how hard I found it to focus on whiteness as it seemed like looking at nothingness. I discover that others who write in the area of White Studies have found the same phenomenon (Dyer 1997; Frankenberg 1999) and I follow this discovery in order to find out more about the *quality* of whiteness. Further questions arose such as:

- Who am I as a white person?
- What is the nature of my privilege as a white person?
- How does being white affect my ability to relate to people who are not white?
- What is the nature of 'race' and who am I in a racialised environment?

In making this inquiry I discovered a prevailing sense of guilt and shame in myself regarding how privileged I am as a white person. My understanding of guilt and shame had been influenced by psychotherapy theorising and, as there is a tendency to regard guilt and shame as evidence of neurosis, I wondered how far my feelings were neurotic and how far they were useful in my inquiry into my own sense of privilege as a white person. I therefore took my inquiry into the nature of guilt and shame, *per se*, before looking at how far they may be signposts on the road to change consciousness of privilege.

A further question thus became:

- Can guilt and shame be useful in drawing attention to the privilege of whiteness?

Race

Insofar as my study is about myself as racially 'white', I need to understand what I mean by the word 'race'. At the start of my inquiry I regarded 'race' as an essentially constructed category in which peoples

with different skin colours are thought to belong to different 'races'. I understood racial prejudice as a term that describes prejudiced attitudes between peoples of these different 'races'. 'Racism' arises when prejudice and discrimination occurs in people from a more powerful 'race' (usually white, western people) towards those of a less powerful 'race' causing disadvantage to the less powerful group. Since then my understanding of the concept of 'race' has not so much changed as deepened. I have come to understand it as a systemic, societal rather than individualistic phenomenon as I show in more detail below. My inquiry has also led me to understand that people, like myself, of European origin[1], have racialised the world in the course of processes of colonisation. In doing so they have declared themselves to be a 'white' and 'superior' 'race' whilst naming other 'races' as inferior (Bonnett 2000). In more recent decades 'white' people seem to have 'forgotten' this 'naming' of 'races' and tend to see themselves as 'neutral' within a racialised environment (Dyer 1997; Bonnett 2000:120). I discuss this further below and in chapter 2 as well as in other places throughout the thesis.

Arenas for my inquiry

This inquiry is set in three arenas:

The first arena is the personal - a first person inquiry (Reason and Bradbury 2001). In this arena I explore my own motivation, including my motivational roots (Hawkins 1997) – what has driven me, my own feelings and thoughts and how I track the changes in my responses as I progress through my inquiry (See particularly chapters 3 and 4).

The second arena is the interpersonal - a second person inquiry. Here I join with others to explore the meaning of being white. Some of this work has been with co-researchers in a co-operative inquiry group (Heron 1996) as others agreed to collaborate with me in this exploration. In

[1] In chapter two I show how white people as they are understood in today's world are in reality

addition, other people have helped me by letting me know their thoughts and feelings. These explorations have been undertaken with various methodologies such as formal and informal interviews including follow-up interviews to questionnaires. Some of this second person inquiry is fully collaborative. At other times I have approached individuals with certain questions of my own. These people cannot really be said to be 'co-researchers' (Heron 1996) as the inquiry is very much my agenda rather than theirs. I have suggested that this might more properly be called an 'extended first person' inquiry as the collaboration with others was not directly 'bought into' by them as part of their own inquiry. However, in all situations I have been clear about my own intentions so that they can make informed choices. I do not claim anything for others, however, that is not claimed by themselves. To this extent my work with them is in the spirit of second person research and certainly within the methodology of action research.

The third area of my inquiry is set within the larger societal context - a third person inquiry. I have worked with many different organisations within the profession of psychotherapy but have chosen here to focus on my main workplace, The Bath Centre for Psychotherapy and Counselling (BCPC). I explore the extent to which a growing understanding of racism allows a change in policy which leads to greater diversity within the organisation. Some of this work was started before this present inquiry at CARPP and some was concurrent with it. These were not formal inquiry processes, but developed naturally from the processes of being a psychotherapist. I have included these experiences in my study as they evolved from the work in a natural way which feels congruent with Reason and Bradley's suggestion that the work should be:

> '.....emergent and evolutionary: you cannot just go to a village or an organisation or a professional group and 'do it', but rather the work evolves (or does not) through mutual engagement and influence.' (Reason and

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a European diaspora.

Bradbury 2001:449)

I show how the work emerged and evolved through my engagement with others within this organisation. Reason and Bradbury go on to say:

> 'Further, because we are participating in work of enduring consequence, we must attend to the question of viability in the longer term (third-person research/practice). We must therefore ask whether the work was seeded in such a way that participation could be sustained in the absence of the initiating researcher. We must create a living interest in the work.' (Reason and Bradbury 2001:449)

This question is extremely important to me and is one I will evaluate at the end of this thesis. Certainly it is my intention that my research will spark a continuing process in the organisation within which I work just as it is my intention that my personal learning process will continue. I will need not only to explore whether this has happened or might happen, but also what I do, or could do, to foster it.

Origins of the work

In both the Diploma and Transfer papers that I wrote at Bath University (CARPP programme), I said that I did not feel clear about my reasons for exploring racism in a psychotherapy context. I suspected myself of being patronising and 'politically correct' and just using 'black' people as objects of interest. My self-searching about this has been a large part of my inquiry. On 12th March 1999, soon after joining CARPP in the January, I wrote a note to myself thus:

> 'I have just written an autobiographical piece about why I am interested in cultural difference - or why I have come to be interested in it. I realise that I have an uneasy feeling that someone might say to me that I am not allowed this subject - I don't deserve it. I haven't met enough discrimination or something. Having understood that I realise that it is another way in which I feel that I don't belong. I can't even belong to those who don't belong! It is as if by going to Channing [my school] I joined the main stream but actually

didn't and so am banished by all worlds.

There was also another thought that I had before writing this piece and I realise that I hadn't included it. That is the way in which I always have identified with minority groups and feel most comfortable within them – Labour (in 1950s and 60s), Northern, Unitarian, Amnesty, occupational therapy, humanistic psychotherapy. I couldn't have been a nurse or a teacher, for instance, because there are too many of them!'

March 12th 1999 Diary entry

The paper I refer to was entitled *Why do I try to understand cultural difference?* In it I explore my own sense of not belonging within cultural groups and discover my mother's discomfort with her own sense of her place in society. I also explored how I am affected by a desire to please my father who was a committed socialist and lover of social justice. I end the paper by saying:

'Looking back I was put in an untenably difficult position about finding my place in the world [while at boarding school amongst richer people of a higher social class and in a different part of the country]. I don't think I ever really felt that I have lived among people that I belong to. In some ways this has been an advantage. Although I feel as if I don't entirely fit anywhere I can rub along with most groups of people. Feeling accepted by a group is something I feel from time to time and when I do I feel wonderful and ridiculously grateful. In fact I probably fit as well as most people within my community of friends and in a day-to-day way I know that I do. At a deeper level I have an uneasy feeling of being odd, at odds, with those around me.'

Included in Diploma Paper for CARPP March 2000

Having written this I can see that in some ways, in wanting to understand people's response to cultural difference, I am still joining with my father to help 'the oppressed'. But maybe beneath that I am searching for my own place – somehow trying to create a world in which differences are acceptable so that I can find my own place within in it.

Saying that I am at odds with the culture may be true but I imagine it does not compare with feeling at odds with the majority culture if you are 'black' or Asian. I therefore decided to inquire into the quality of my own contact with black people. My first thought in relation to this was the memory of a close friend at school who was Nigerian. Writing a paper about my relationship with her was an important step for me in understanding more about my own racism. I wanted to understand something about the complexity of my own cultural position in the school and in relation to my friend. Towards the end of that paper I wrote:

> 'This whole experience of my school life, including my own coming into a different cultural group, has given me a feel for what it is like to be on both ends of cultural differences and a certain knowledge that these differences left unacknowledged can be harmful to the spirit of the individual and of the larger cultural group. It blights wholehearted engagement in life, as in my timid attempts to 'fit in' and leads to the angry rejection of one group of another, just as Abiola [a Nigerian school friend] quite rightly rejected me and my friends.....Writing this paper has been a step in grounding my approach to my research. It has strengthened my realisation that I need to understand and accept my own racism, to know it more intimately, and take it fully into account. Only in so doing will I be able to recognise and face up to racism in others and relate honestly to black people I know personally and as larger cultural groups.'
>
> *Included in PhD transfer paper, September 2001*

And yet the question still remains: what is my business in writing about racism? I am not black. I do not suffer from racist attitudes. Or do I? If I do, how do I? I suffer from uncomfortable feelings of shame and guilt because of the way I know that I benefit in a material sense from the way that society is arranged. Thinking I can maintain these benefits may well be short-sighted but am I prepared to give them up? They are built into the fabric of society so can I give them up even if I want to? I have to live in a violent and angry society fed by injustice because the splits that racist attitudes engender result in conflict. At some level, rather than delighting in diversity, I am afraid. These are questions and thoughts that

have preoccupied me in the course of my inquiry.

Being a white person

I have restricted this thesis to an exploration of my position as a white person and psychotherapist within the constructed world where 'race' becomes a category, partly for the sake of a more containable process, but also because, in the course of this inquiry, these thoughts 'captured' me and have become my preoccupation. I discovered this focus organically, as I will show below and throughout my thesis, by becoming interested in myself as 'white'. Being challenged in my PhD supervision group to focus more on myself and rather than on 'black' people sparked off this interest.

At some points over the course of my inquiry I have tried to define the terms that I use and it was often the lack of validity in the words and phrases that have pushed my thinking further as well as my reading (see chapter 2). For instance the term 'ethnicity' seems to imply that some people 'have' an ethnicity. We do not talk about craft work carried out by white people as being 'ethnic', for example. I now know that this definition of terms is very hard to undertake without being constantly in danger of colluding with the 'racial' project that has been undertaken by white people over the last few centuries. The white, European diaspora, have declared themselves to be a superior race of 'white' people and others 'races' as inferior (Bonnett 2000). However unjust, this process has occurred and does affect global relationships. As the whole racialised environment was created by white people the terms we use in association with it like 'black', 'ethnic', 'race', or even 'west' and 'east' become illegitimate because they are imposed. The very fact that Europe and America are to the west of the globe when drawn on a flat page is because that is how Europeans represented it. Sometimes the best that can be done is to put these terms in inverted commas to indicate that it is problematic.

It is this racialising process, as well as the cultural differences which are

embedded within this racialisation and its impact on me, that I wish to explore in this thesis. The impact on me includes myself as a private individual, myself as a psychotherapist as well as the profession of psychotherapy as a whole.

In chapter 2 I look at the way in which 'white' people have colonised the globe and still do in more subtle ways by using their economic and cultural power to privilege their own agendas. I am concerned to ensure that my work as a psychotherapist is carried out with an understanding of this cultural and political context and I address this particularly in chapter 6.

The interface of race and culture

In the course of my inquiry I have become clearer about the differences between the terms 'race' and 'culture' and this has helped me to become clearer about my own 'cultural' position as distinct from myself as a 'racialised' person – one who exists as a white person within a 'racialised' environment. The term 'culture' refers to groups who share similar norms and assumptions, usually unquestioningly (Trompenaars 1993:21 - 22). These groups may be very large such as national groups or very small such as family groups. Cultural groups do not have firm edges. There are innumerable cultural groups and sub-groups throughout the world with different assumptions and attitudes embedded within their interconnected consciousness but they each have fluid, semi permeable boundaries. Particularly in recent times people can, and most often do, belong to several overlapping cultures that may hold different norms and assumptions. There may be a completely different culture at home, for instance, to that at work. This is particularly true of second generation immigrants who may live at home in one very different culture to the one in their wider lives.

The concept of 'race' is not the same as culture, as culture cuts across 'racial' differences (black people may be British, for instance), so conflating the two may imply a legitimisation of the idea of

'race'(Frankenberg 1999:19). Nevertheless, I show how cultural issues cannot be ignored when exploring the effect of racialisation in a psychotherapy, or maybe any other, context. Relating within the racialised environment often involves a dialogue with people who do have differences in culture as I will explore particularly in chapter 3.

My own place within a racialised and cultural context

In the course of my study I became more and more clear that racism is better understood if we do not see it as individualistic, but as a culturally determined belief system which is woven into the fabric of society and is therefore manifest in the attitudes and assumptions of individuals. I need to understand my own place within this system so that I comprehend the way that racism is played out in my relationships. My path towards this understanding went through a time when the question of being English arose for me. I wondered if being 'white' or being 'English' was primary for me. I decided in the end that being 'white' was more important because much of what I wanted to say was true because I am white and not just because I am English. However I did discover a discomfort in myself about being English and that is partly what led me to write about shame and guilt. In a paper about being English I wrote:

> 'In pushing past my feeling that being English has a nothingness about it, what do I find? My first thought is John Major's attempt at describing a culture involving warm beer and cricket in country villages! I feel rather repelled and hurry to find something else, aware that anything that sounds self-congratulatory about being English is immediately rejected by me. I try to make a tentative step towards a cultural experience. I have a view from my window that has often been described to me as 'very English'. I can see 20 – 30 miles of rolling hills and two or three distant villages. Middle-sized fields surrounded mostly by stone walls cover the hills in various shades of green and brown. There is a wood in the middle ground of deciduous, broad-leafed trees such as oaks and ashes. Hedges surround the smaller fields in the foreground as the land falls away to a deep valley. Birds of prey and sea gulls swoop and glide below me from my elevated position whilst smaller birds fly around in front of the window. Two large Douglas firs and a

Wellingtonia tree dominate the immediate foreground, reminders of a confident Victorian/Edwardian past. This view does not allow me to forget the days when people were proud to be English and brought their plunder from foreign lands to grace their English gardens. What I can see constantly changes by the minute, hour, day, week and year as the light, the visibility, the seasons, the work of the farmers and the weather changes it. As I gaze at this view for hours each week, walk in it and put my hands in its soil, it becomes part of my inner landscape. Is my soul learning to know a sort of Englishness, one that is connected to the land?'

September 2001

I felt that in some way I had come to terms with this ambivalence but found that I felt just as pained on reading, more recently, a paper called English National Identity and the English Landscape. Having read that I wrote the following in my diary:

'I have just read a paper called British National Identity and English Landscape by David Lowenthal. (Lowenthal 1986). I wanted to capture a feeling I have about it. I am struck by the sense in the paper of the unacceptableness of English people loving their landscape – or of loving being English. I heard an African woman (can't now remember which country) on the TV saying how she loved her country and the people of it and there was no sense of shame or inappropriateness about it. In this paper (which was hard to read, not just emotionally, but because it is a very bad photocopy!) the author was saying that there was something arrogant about English people's love of the landscape. It was anyway not as timeless as we thought as it had changed over the last 2 centuries and it had become prettied up and nostalgic and made into 'heritage'. Very tidy and neat with nothing out of place as if people could not inhabit it.

I know there is truth in that but it isn't the only truth. I think a sense of inhabiting a landscape that has been walked on and worked with for generations is fine and genuinely moving. Of course all peoples of the world feel like or may feel like that about the landscape they inherit. My sense though is that it has become shameful for thinking people to identify with anything English because it invokes a self-satisfied, over confident, arrogant

past (and possibly present if this paper is correct) where others were unthinkingly subjugated and were told they ought to be thankful about it because we know best. It's as if this also has soaked into the landscape so that it becomes shameful to love it. I feel it as a deep wound.

I guess I could be savage about it too like David Lowenthal but it isn't really what I feel. I feel hurt by it. I would like to be able to love England without the shame of the British Empire being part and parcel of it. As I pointed out in my paper on Englishness, I can actually see from my window trees that were planted by people who brought them back from parts of the Empire or parts of the world they wanted to plunder like China. I would like to be able to admire their indomitable nature in an uncomplicated way but I also feel ashamed of their arrogant self-satisfaction and blinkered view.

Feb 2004

This shows how my focus on 'race' may be grounded in being white but my sense of being English is also of necessity an important part of my experience. This includes England as a major colonial power that played a large role in shaping the modern world. I explore this further in chapter 2.

When I started this work I was already aware that problems with diversity were not a problem 'out there' for 'black' people. If we are really to tackle problems with our society not properly representing its diverse communities then a good place to start is with one's own place in colluding to keep the status quo. However, it is easier to say this than to really engage with it when one is part of a cultural majority that has as much power as the white, western culture. Most of what we read and see and experience takes for granted that this cultural view-point is a base line from which others deviate. Moving from this position is like being strongly magnetised to a position and having to heave yourself away from it. The magnet is always in danger of dragging you back. The more I resist this magnet the less power it seems to have over me so that I feel that a less 'white-centric' view has become somewhat more natural to me over time though I can still feel the old magnetic pull.

Working with unconscious processes within the inquiry

In chapter 3 I look at the power that unconscious processes have in influencing underlying thoughts and attitudes. I have found within my inquiry that, if I am to really understand the assumptions that underlie my experience as a white person, I must be prepared, as far as I am able, to inquire into unconscious processes (See below for a definition of 'unconscious processes'). As I have stated above, one of the important reasons for choosing action research as a methodology was its openness to this type of inquiry. I wanted not to be afraid to explore any aspect of myself that arose as my inquiry progressed. I have been on a long journey regarding my reasons for wanting to study racial and cultural difference. The challenge to myself has been productive in uncovering the complex contradictions in concepts I have held about race.

My research process has been complex because I had to take unconscious processes into account. I have done so in order that genuine rather than superficial shifts in my own and others' awareness could take place as beliefs and assumptions are held in place unconsciously. (Adams 1996:153). .

What are unconscious processes?

My way of understanding the term 'unconscious' differs from the traditional Freudian or Jungian way. To Freud individuals 'have' a 'psyche' that is an individual rather than a relational phenomenon. He understood the unconscious to be a structure within the psyche and the psyche to consist of the Id, the Ego and the Superego. He saw the Id, and to some extent the Superego, as unconscious with the Id as being a cauldron of instinctive desires (Freud 1973:106). It therefore had to be kept in check by the Ego which mediated with reality. Unacceptable feelings and thoughts were 'pushed down' into the unconscious and would then re-emerge in various symbolic ways such as with 'slips of the tongue' (Freud 1938:103), bodily ailments or inexplicable behaviour such

as forgetting appointments (Freud 1938:74; Freud 1973). Jung suggested a 'collective unconscious' (Jung 1959:42; Samuels, Shorter et al. 1986) that we all can tap into as a source of spiritual nourishment. For Freud the unconscious was something each individual 'possessed'. For Jung it was partly personal but partly also transpersonal, maybe not found 'between' us, as the intersubjectivists would see it (Stolorow and Atwood 1992), but 'around' us.

My own understanding of the unconscious is that it exists in the spaces within and between us, as that which cannot be acknowledged or symbolised. I have found the intersubjectivists, Stolorow and Atwood, very helpful in understanding this. They suggest three types of unconscious – the *prereflective*, the *dynamic* and the *unvalidated* (Stolorow and Atwood 1992:33)

The **prereflective** unconscious consists of the 'organising principles' that unconsciously 'shape and thematize a person's experience' (Stolorow and Atwood 1992:33). This idea 'fits' with an understanding of culture, as they suggest that our experience is shaped by these 'organising principles' (Stolorow and Atwood 1992:33) of which we are largely unconscious, and which act as a sort of 'blueprint' (Stolorow and Atwood 1992:35) for life. These principles are soaked up naturally from our cultural milieux as we grow up. Learning to understand this 'blueprint' can free us from the assumptions that inevitably arise from it.

The **'dynamic unconscious'** consists of the 'experiences that were denied articulation because they were perceived to threaten needed ties' (Stolorow and Atwood 1992:33). In other words experiences which may seem to threaten our bonds with others – particularly primary care-gives on whom our very existence, both physical and emotional, relies. This is more like the Freudian unconscious in that it is more individual to us. The dynamic unconscious consists of what we as individuals cannot accept. It is nevertheless understood to have arisen within an intersubjective, relational context.

The **'unvalidated unconscious'** consists of the 'experiences that could not be articulated because they never evoked the requisite validating responsiveness from the surround' (Stolorow and Atwood 1992:33). They understand that our potential is present at birth but needs what they call 'validating responsiveness' to come into being. This idea is common in psychotherapy theorising. Winnicott, for instance, suggested that we are born with potential that is only brought out by a 'facilitating environment' (Winnicott 1965:300; Winnicott 1971:105). We are therefore unconscious of what we have never known but might still know if we are given more conducive circumstances.

Stolorow and Atwood (1992:33) say that 'all three forms of unconsciousness .....derive from specific formative *intersubjective* contexts.' (emphasis mine)

How far can this way of understanding the unconscious help us to comprehend forces that give rise to racism? The individual's unconscious process in relation to racism has been discussed by psychotherapy theorists in terms of 'splitting' and 'projection' (Kareem and Littlewood 1992; Adams 1996:132-133)[2]. This theory understands racists as people who split off unacceptable parts of the self and projecting them on to 'black' groups or individuals. As 'black' is often associated with 'darkness' and 'evil' (Adams 1996:20; Dalal 2002:153 and chapter 4), it is an easy target for this sort of projection. I am interested to discover if the intersubjectivists' way of understanding the unconscious helps us to understand whether racism is something personal to us, however intersubjectively formed, or more a matter of

[2] The term 'splitting' is often used by Kleinian psychoanalysts (Hinshelwood 1989) and those influenced by them as Klein talked of 'schizoid' mechanisms in which unacceptable parts of the self are split off and denied. These are often then 'projected' into others rather than owned as part of the self. Klein particularly introduced the idea of the paranoid/schizoid 'position' (Klein 1986, Hinshelwood 1989)which is held by the infant in relation to the mother so that the 'good' mother (or breast) is phantasised to be different to the 'bad' mother (or breast). The complexity and anxiety of ambivalence does not then have to be experienced.

societal context.

Unconscious Processes and Institutional Racism

Institutional racism is largely unconscious and is a term in current usage which maybe comes nearest to my own understanding of racism. This term is used to describe the way in which racist attitudes can run through the fabric of society in an endemic and largely unconscious way and seem to be much more intractable than personal racism. Institutional racism was famously brought to public attention in the Macpherson Report (1999) on the murder of Stephen Laurence. In 2000 I wrote a short briefing paper for the UK Council for Psychotherapy suggesting that institutional racism is as prevalent in the psychotherapy profession as it is in the police force. In it I point out that Macpherson writes about 'unwitting' and 'unintentional racism' and seems to make this interchangeable with 'unconscious racism', a term which implies that there is no consciousness of the racism. I suggested in the paper that a distinction needs to be drawn between these terms although there may well be a genuinely felt desire not to be racist in both cases. I think nevertheless that it is vital to draw a distinction here between unwitting and unconscious racism. In the briefing paper I point out that:

> '.....the terms 'unconscious', 'unwitting' and 'unintentional' racism are all used but not really defined in the report and it is implied that they mean something the same. The terms 'unwitting' or 'unintentional' imply to me that there is something accidental in the behaviour. This suggests that the behaviour would stop if it were pointed out to the individual. They would become more careful in the future. If the racism is unconscious then it will not so easily be dealt with as it implies that the individual is driven by unconscious motivation and forms of thinking.'
>
> *Included as an appendix in PhD/MPhil transfer paper September 2001*

I think this is important because, if racism is 'unconscious' rather than 'unwitting', it implies a different and much more difficult path to bringing

about change. In fact, for me, the term 'institutional racism' implies that the racism is embedded in the 'organising principles' (Stolorow and Atwood 1992) of society in an endemic way. In the course of my subsequent inquiry my growing awareness of racism led me to understand racism as intersubjective in nature (see chapter 3).

Unconscious processes and 'politically correct' behaviour

An alternative to working with unconscious processes may be to apply 'politically correct' behaviour and principles. These have grown up more or less informally and provides a convention that, if you follow 'correctly', will ensure that you will not *be seen* to behave in a prejudiced way. My own way of inquiring into conscious and unconscious awareness is an alternative to this as I *allow* thoughts and feelings which are unacceptable to this 'politically correct' code. Rather than 'correct' my behaviour I reflect upon it to discover more of its meaning. For instance, when an African client sits on the floor rather than a chair I notice that I think that he is probably not used to chairs and a sense of being 'primitive' comes to my mind. In order to be politically correct I should bat these thoughts away. Instead I wonder about both his sitting on the floor and my own response and allow them to be there without an immediate conclusion as to what it means. I sense that some unconscious assumptions or beliefs have been triggered between us but I do not rush to try to understand or correct it. I allow it to be wondered about.

Having said that, I do consider that 'politically correct' ideas have certainly been successful in changing many behaviours and attitudes. It is almost unheard of now to refer to black people as 'coloured' or 'negro', for instance or, indeed, the word 'chairman' rather than 'chairperson' or 'chair'. It provides a simple code of behaviour that is relatively easily followed and can be taught in a straightforward way. However feelings towards those one regards as having a different 'race' may be very complex and not readily dealt with by prescribing a simple formula. The reception of 'politically correct' behaviour in society has been mixed and is often derided as being absurd, for instance on its embargo on the use

of the word 'black' in any circumstances. Although change is not as easy as the use of 'politically correct' language and behaviour implies, I do also think from my personal experience that changing our habits of speech can effect a change in attitude as well.

The difficulty with this approach to racism is that it can encourage racist thoughts and feelings to go underground. I am not suggesting that the hiding of racist attitudes is necessarily unconscious. An individual may make a conscious effort not to use offensive language when in certain situations (such as at work where it is required that they do not show racist attitudes) whilst knowing quite consciously that these are not their real attitudes. This was clearly shown on a BBC programme and reported in the Guardian (Carter 2003) in which a reporter joined the police force under cover in order to show the real racism that is found there. Although the police in this case were conscious of their racism, it is my contention that the reason for their racism is, at least in part, unconscious, much of it is held within the organisanising principles (Stolorow and Atwood 1992:33) of individuals and groups. In fact, the unconscious, endemic racism in the police force shows itself by the very fact of providing courses which tell policemen and women how to behave, as a change in behaviour can thus be learnt compliantly, leaving basic attitudes and assumptions untouched. If these basic attitudes are to be changed it would be necessary to open up the unconscious, implicit assumptions operating in the police culture from which racist attitudes spring. It is too easy to think that getting rid of obviously racist officers will 'get rid' of the problem, rather than see it as being embedded in the culture.

Changes to my client work through working with unconscious processes
In this inquiry I have wanted as far as possible to work with, rather than avoid, unconscious racism in myself so have sought not merely to apply politically correct behaviour and principles, but to understand it, as I showed above. I was determined that I would allow myself to think thoughts only caught at the edge of awareness to try to catch my own

unconscious racism, as well as reminding myself to pay attention to the feedback of others. As time went on, and particularly by the emphasis placed on this in the White Co-operative Inquiry group (see chapter 5), I became more and more sensitised to catching thoughts that are just on the edge of consciousness, such as seeing a black person in an expensive car and wondering how s/he could afford it. This is uncomfortable and painful work and it is easy to retreat into a 'politically correct' position. I wanted to be more honest than to retreat in that way by acknowledging, if possible, any feelings and thoughts that arise out of what I feel rather than just acknowledging the acceptable ones.

In starting this inquiry I was interested to see if my work with clients from non-white groups would improve or change in any way as a result of my research. The kind of changes which I hoped to see would indicate a greater ability in myself and my clients to talk about the difficult feelings that arise when white and black people meet, and a greater sense of trust resulting from this. I often find it hard to get beyond a client's flattering feeling that I am 'not like the others' (see Lynne Jacob's (2000) remarks in chapter 2) when I try to approach this area. In order to address this I might say, for instance, that I guess they feel they need to be polite to me as I seem to want to be helpful. It feels like delicate ground, particularly as being 'rude' to someone who is a professional and evidently trying to be helpful is 'bad manners' in most cultures. Getting beyond this is often difficult. I try to pick up on ways in which 'intersubjective disjunctions' (Stolorow and Atwood 1992:103 and see chapter 6) are evident; in other words where the differences between my own and my client's 'organising principles' have led to misunderstanding. I say how I have experienced this misunderstanding in order to show that I welcome it being explored between us.

The following extract is from my notes of a client who was brought up in an Islamic country and is an example:

'We talked of what she called being 'human' rather than a 'person'. She was using the word 'person' to mean something like 'less than human'. She said she was often treated as a 'person' here and gave an example of a dentist who didn't want to treat her. She also said that women were treated in this way in Islam. I asked how she felt treated by me. She said I treated her as 'human' and that if she felt I didn't she would immediately leave. I asked her about not feeling a sense of belonging when treated like a 'person' in England. She didn't understand my use of the word 'belong' and we tried to understand each other. I suggested this didn't feel like her 'place' and made a sort of downward gesture with my hand. She said of course she did not feel that here. I wondered if, although I seemed to treat her as a human, that she might have feelings about me being part of a country in which she didn't feel she belonged. She seemed to dismiss this. Now I am thinking about it, I may not be from her country but I am a woman. Solidarity with women seems very important to her. No doubt there are other feelings to contact here.'

Notes written on 2nd June 2004

Although this client no doubt generally felt that I was on her side, her feelings may well be more complex than that. I noticed for instance the sharpness with which she told me 'of course she didn't feel that here' (ie with me). I try to stay alert for any disjunctions between us while allowing that I may also provide her with a relatively safe place within a hostile environment. This kind of sensitivity is an example of the ways in which I have developed skills in working with my own awareness of my whiteness and the way it affects my relationship with others. As I explored in chapter 6, inquiring into my own unconscious processes has helped me to work more sensitively with clients.

Returning to questions

In order to make this kind of study, whether or not the unconscious is taken into account, I need to be aware both of questions that were in my mind at the start and the questions that are thrown up by engaging in it. Hawkins (1994) points out that questions are more important than answers. When we are questioning our mind is still open. We can be

playful and creative. When we have decided on an answer the further options have often been ruled out and we are likely to feel that our answers have to be defended. So for me questions do not so much get answered as engaged with. Sometimes a question becomes resolved for a time only to re-emerge as fresh light falls on it. Sometimes the question changes or deepens; sometimes it is just known more thoroughly.

This approach to questions is congruent with an action research approach. Action research is an *inquiry.* If we are to inquire it follows that we must question. But we inquire using *cycles* of action and reflection (Moustakis 1990:40; Marshall 2001:435). The process will be something like the following:

- On reflection a question occurs to us.
- We then act to find out more about the question
- We reflect again on our findings, thus possibly coming to some sort of an answer.
- We may, however, come up with another question.
- Even our tentative answers are questioned again
- Further action may bring out further answers or further questions and so on.

These and other questions do not arise from a *tabula rasa.* They arise from the complexity of my life experience and led me to my study as we will see below. They are woven throughout this inquiry and many layers of them will be discovered through my engagement with it. I explore my use of questions and how they change as part of my methodology in this inquiry in the next chapter.

An outline of the thesis

The thesis is in three parts. The first part is called *Philosophical and Methodological Considerations.* It has two chapters, *Ontology and*

Epistemology and *Methodology and Validity.* This section explores the way in which my inquiry is underpinned by research theory and practice. It sets out the ontology and epistemology that underlies it and the methodology that I have chosen to use as well as how I have ensured the validity of the study. I show how my methodology is congruent both with psychotherapy and with an exploration of racial diversity.

The second section is called *An Exploration of Being White.* The purpose of this section is to explore and to understand more clearly my identity as a white person. There are three chapters. The first starts an exploration of my identity as a white person/psychotherapist and is called *Being white.* In it I draw on both my own experience of having a white racial identity and the experience and thoughts of others, both known to me personally and authors of books and papers on this subject. I have not included a literature review in this thesis as a specific chapter but have reviewed various texts throughout. In this chapter these include several, mostly from the academic discipline of White Studies as well as two key texts by a psychotherapist and a counsellor, *For Whites Only* by Lynne Jacobs, (Jacobs 2000) and, *Racial Identity, White Counsellors and Therapists* by Gill Tuckwell, (Tuckwell 2002). Besides these key texts I also explore the work of various psychotherapy theorists, particularly those of the Intersubjectivist School from the Institute of Contemporary Psychoanalysis in Los Angeles and Dialogic Gestalt therapists as well as the work of Dalal, whose book *Race, Colour and the Processes of Racialisation*, has also been particularly influential for me (Dalal 2002). His understanding of the concept of race and racism as constructed rather than real categories and his nuanced appreciation of the meaning of racism within western society are important for my study.

I also start to discover what it means to me to be white and western[3] in a diverse world, both by reflecting on my personal experience and that of various authors. In this chapter I have shown that it is very hard to

[3] For a discussion about the term 'western' in this context see chapter 2

challenge well-worn pathways of the mind and see my own assumptions as being just that, assumptions and not a basically correct position from which others might deviate.

In the following chapter, *A co-operative inquiry into the experience of being white,* I joined with others in a co-operative inquiry to explore these same ideas. Having conducted a first person inquiry by reflecting on my own experiences and reading, I decided that I wanted to connect with others to explore these areas to see if my experiences were similar or differed to theirs, to spark off new thoughts and to bring some challenge to my ideas. I therefore sought out others to join with me in my research. This chapter is an account of how the inquiry was set up, what occurred when we met and the learning that sprang from it.

In the course of the exploration within this group I was confirmed in an idea that feelings of guilt and shame were endemic in white people regarding race. I have therefore included a chapter about this called, *An Exploration of Guilt and Shame Experienced by White People.* This chapter makes an inquiry into how far this is the case and whether feelings of guilt and/or shame may be useful in alerting us to our racism or merely self indulgent and irrelevant to those on the receiving end. This chapter draws on my own experience and also that of my co-researchers as well as others through the use of questionnaires and follow-up interviews in order that my own thinking can be stretched and challenged through creative dialogues (Chisholm 2001:329). These experiences are supplemented by my reading of various texts about guilt and shame from psychotherapy and sociology. The chapter also shows how I gradually come to understand that racisim is largely an intersubjective phenomenon, embedded within the fabric of society. This has a profound effect on how I understand guilt and shame in the context of racism as I become more interested in the way that guilt and shame are experienced in regard to institutional rather than personal racism.

In the third section of the thesis, *Being a white psychotherapist*, I bring

what I have learnt about my white racial identity to bear on my practice as a psychotherapist, particularly insofar as there is a racial difference between myself and my clients. In the first chapter of this section, *Psychotherapy within a White Hegemony,* I set out to look at how my identity as a white psychotherapist affects my practice in work with my individual clients. The chapter starts with an exploration of my own development as a psychotherapist and how an appreciation of racism in myself and in the profession gradually arose. I go on to explore how I work within a racialised environment. For this purpose I draw most extensively on my work with asylum seekers and refugees. In particular I look at the way that intersubjectivity theory is helpful to working across cultures and races, taking not only cultural and racial differences into account but also, most importantly, power differences. This chapter draws out my development as a psychotherapist including my theoretical and practical approach to the work and shows how I became aware of myself as white within this context and how I responded to this realization. This exploration includes a review of the literature that has influenced me, particularly the Intersubjectivists and I also refer to those that write on the subject of Intercultural therapy such as Sue and Sue, (1990) Lago and Thompson (1996) and Kareem and Littlewood (1992).

In the second chapter of this section, called *Performing Whiteness in Psychotherapy Organisations*, I explore my work within one particular organisation to improve its diversity as well as its understanding of race and racism. This includes work within management and with training programmes. It brings the work into a 'third person' realm (Reason and Bradbury 2001) where I try to make a difference, not only to my own practice, but also in the psychotherapy profession more generally. I explore three areas where I made initiatives for change: one, to bring more tutors and students into the organisation from black and minority ethnic groups, two, to set up an introductory course called Counselling in a Multicultural Setting and three, to set up a counselling and psychotherapy service for asylum seekers and refugees.

In the conclusion I reflect on the learning from my inquiry and the way that engagement in it has brought about changes in my own ways of understanding myself within a racialised environment. This leads me to explore how the learning can become built into my life, my practice and that of the organisations with which I am associated.

PART ONE

PHILOSOPHICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

CHAPTER ONE

ONTOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY

(How much simpler to let things do only
What they can do)
Being uncreative about what seems dark
And terrifying;
Preferring only what seems easy
And effortless;
Asking about the numbers of a philosophy's
Followers rather than examining
The efficacy of its ideas.
From *Mental Fight* by Ben Okri

Introduction

In this chapter I set out to look at the particular ontological and epistemological issues with which I have approached my inquiry and which emerged in the course of it. I have taken the two together so that what I hold to be true (my *ontology*) and what I understand of the nature of knowledge (my *epistemology*) can be clear from the beginning. How I understand my truth, my ontology, is important for my research but so is being clear about how I know it to be true, my epistemology. In this way I can work towards finding out more about the world I live in including my own place within it. The clearer I am about this epistemology the better I am in a position to think about how I might go about making discoveries. The way in which I go about making discoveries, my methods, is my methodology and the validity of these methods is consistent with the way I choose my methodology. These I explore in the next chapter.

Ontology and epistemology

In asserting that my own experience is a valid basis for my inquiry I have chosen to come to the CARPP rather than a positivistic research school because it values personal experience as a valid and vital part of any inquiry (Marshall 2001). In positivistic research 'objective' facts are sought through the use of methodology which keeps (or attempts to keep) the researcher out of the frame for fear of contaminating it. Action research recognises that in so doing reality is distorted because it is not possible to exclude oneself from the field of inquiry (Gaventa and Cornwall 2001). This whole debate challenges the notion of 'truth'. With action research, the notion of 'objective truth' has to be abandoned as action researchers recognise that our subjectivity is always present. We cannot step outside to see the world in an 'objective' way.

And yet it is hard for me to abandon a search for truth. Although my ontological position is that truth is a slippery and problematic concept I find that I want to make an attempt to find it. For me the idea that something is 'true' is very powerful. It is like a homecoming, something I can rest upon. I find it tempting to understand 'truth' to be something very clear and simple, that cuts through the complexities of human life and shines a clear light on what is good and pure. I am reminded of Keats writing of a Grecian urn:

> Beauty is truth, truth beauty
> That is all ye know on earth
> And all ye need to know.
>
> *Keats*: Ode on a Grecian Urn

I like to think that this poem does say something 'true' about truth. Keats is not talking of a simplistic idea that telling the truth is just a matter of honestly recounting an 'objective' truth but speaking of the truth being at the heart of the matter. And yet concepts such as 'truth at the heart of the matter' and 'the heart of the matter' itself have been called into

question by post modernists (Shotter 1993:66), who see all truths as relative and experience-reality as being contingent on context.

Whilst being drawn to the idea that, if you cut away egotistical concerns, a kernel of truth can be found, I am finding that what is true in one circumstance or at one angle may not be so in another. Elizabeth Whitmore (1994:97) points out that in research:

> 'We think that respondents are telling us the truth, that we are collecting information that is valid. We think that we know the 'true' meaning of what we hear and see. This is a sad illusion. The reality is that the economic, cultural, racial and gender differences among people are profound and extremely complex. To ignore this creates knowledge that is deeply flawed.'

The difficulty with validity that Whitmore refers to is true for any human interaction as differences of the sort she refers to are always present. It is particularly important for my study as, especially in Part 3 where I focus on my work as a psychotherapist, I specifically explore working across cultural difference. For this reason the kind of knowledge I am particularly interested in is a knowledge that emerges between myself and others. It is the kind of knowledge that 'works' for us for the time being with the understanding that this could change and that others hold other truths. As Shotter (1993:19) says:

> [knowledge about how *to be* a person] 'does not have to be finalized or formalized in a set of proven theoretical statements before it can be applied. It is not theoretical knowledge.....for it is knowledge-in-practice, nor is it merely knowledge of craft or skill ('knowing-how), for it is joint knowledge, knowledge-held-in-common with others. It is a third kind of knowledge one has from within a situation, a group, social institution, or society; it is what we might call a 'knowledge-from".

The concept 'knowledge-from' provides a way of resolving the epistemological dilemma, as to whether truth is a fundamental or a relative construct. I have found this perspective useful both in this study

and in my work as a psychotherapist that has become more and more intersubjective and dialogic in nature over the last ten years or so (see chapter 6). As the epistemological stance of understanding truth to be emergent became more embodied in practice, it led me to understand psychotherapy as an inquiry process in which the subjectivity of both psychotherapist and client is acknowledged. This makes it very similar to an action research inquiry process. The process of allowing a sense of what is 'true' to emerge in the spaces between us seems to uncover what feels to be a basic truth whilst not denying its relational rather than 'objective' nature. Stolorow, Atwood and Orange say:

> 'We must attend to truth-as-possible-understanding and not truth-as correspondence-to-fact.' (2002:119)

If we are to discover the knowledge that arises in the space between people, as in the psychotherapy relationship, it is often necessary to experience and acknowledge the differences that we find within that space. Skating over differences and rushing to find commonality can make the contact much more superficial, as the values and assumptions that underlie our attitudes will be hidden. Questioning these values and assumptions becomes all important – particularly in this inquiry which explores differences in races and cultures. In fact I could almost say that the work *is* about this questioning and that my methodology should be chosen with this in mind. This requires me first of all to question and understand the *way* that I think when faced with differences. Much of this study is an extended exploration of this as the 'action' I take lays bare both what I have thought unconsciously or out of my awareness and how my thinking changes in relation to my experience. An example of this concerns my work with The Bath Centre for Psychotherapy and Counselling (see chapter 7). I have found that in running a course called Working with Difference I colluded with others to make the course a voluntary one rather than compulsory, thus accepting that the course is not vital for the training of psychotherapists.

This way of understanding 'truth' underlies my use of dialogue in my inquiry which I explore further, below. My understanding about dialogue is influenced by Bohm who also is helpful here in his understanding of how the word 'thinking' relates to the word 'thought' (Bohm 1996:52). He points out that the word 'thinking' is in the present continuous tense. It is therefore an on-going phenomenon. 'Thought' on the other hand is a word in the past tense. He describes it as a 'trace' left by thinking and that thoughts act 'automatically'. As a result of our thinking 'automatic' thoughts occur which underpin our ways of approaching life. These are the beliefs and values that we mostly hold without question[4]. They lead to assumptions on which our actions are based. In order to be true to my ontology and epistemology I must question these assumptions as this will help to make plain my beliefs and values and question their validity. Throughout my research I try, in common with all action researchers, to be aware of the beliefs, values and assumptions that underpin it so that the research will have integrity and so that I will 'critically communicate the inquiry process instead of just presenting its results and some reflections on it' (Reason and Bradbury 2004). This directly affects my methodology as, in order to ensure that I am able to carry out this process, I record processes that I go through, realisations I come to and important events that I experience in a diary or a note to myself or to others. In this way I am able to refer to them as a contemporary record when I write up the research.

Paradoxical nature of change

Central to my ontology, my practice as a psychotherapist and to this inquiry, is a belief that we cannot make fundamental changes through an effort of will. This is based on my experience, particularly of being in therapy, where I have discovered that conscious determination to change almost always breaks down in the end. I may, for instance, dislike the way I am subservient in a particular relationship. However hard I try, nothing seems to change. On the other hand, the more I

[4] This is similar to of Stolorow et al's notion of 'organising principles' (Stolorow and Atwood

understand what this subservience is about and learn just to notice and have compassion for my behaviour, the more changes are likely to happen. These may include being less attached to not being subservient.

The nature of change became important for my inquiry because in it I challenge myself and other white people to change their perspective on their whiteness (see particularly chapter 3). However, I notice that when I 'try' to change I find more and more subtle ways of not changing and know from my work with psychotherapy clients that it is true of most of us. This phenomenon is similar to what Beisser (1970) calls the 'paradoxical theory of change' and is something that I am aware of throughout my research. My research is carried out in the light of this paradox. Beisser says 'that change occurs when one becomes what he (sic) is, not when he tries to become what he is not' (Beisser 1970:88). This implies that a greater understanding of oneself leads to becoming more one's 'true' self rather than trying to attempt to become someone else.

My more recent epistemology questions the idea of a 'true self'. It implies a modernist idea of the self as being coherent and unitary rather than a post-modernist view in which our sense of self is understood within a context (Shotter 1993:95)[5]. I think it also implies something important about the contradictory nature of change, so this way of understanding change is congruent with a post-modern epistemology. I am reminded of what Whitehead (1999) refers to as a 'living contradiction' when his espoused theory is contradicted by the way he acts in his life. I have learnt that it is impossible not to be judgmental but that I can, by compassionate encouragement of myself, *witness* this judgmentalness. So I might notice my behaviour by thinking, for instance, 'Oh look how I am feeling ashamed about.....' thus

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1992)

[5] Modernists tend to say that we 'have' a 'self' where a post-modernist would talk about a 'sense of self'.

challenging myself without continuing the cycle of accusation and blame. It is also similar to the notion of 'internal supervision' (Casement 1985:49) in which a psychotherapist undefensively reflects on experience during a session (See chapter 6).

In psychotherapy this attitude is sometimes described as 'one foot in and one foot out'. The two feet still belong to the same body but two places are inhabited at the same time. This is not to be confused with an emotionally cut off stance where one's client or oneself is regarded from an emotionally distant place. There is a very important distinction here. Although regarding oneself from an emotionally 'cut off' place can seem to be about self-reflection, it encourages us to see ourselves as a sort of commodity. I have a client who often uses diagnostic labels to describe herself and even says, for instance, 'self is depressed' rather than 'I feel wretched'. Although she may be reflecting on herself she is not allowing an experience-near way of expressing what she feels. When she does she discovers very raw feelings that she is only gradually able to approach. We have found that this happens because she no longer makes an artificial separation between herself and her feelings.

Wheway (1999) describes something similar. He sees this 'being' with oneself and the other as similar to meditation. He says:

> 'Being, I think is another word for Spirit. At times what happens in therapy, its content, may not look very spiritual; but the process, for both therapist and client, in my belief, is a spiritual one – if you will, it is a karmic yoga, a path of action that leads to enlightenment – not one grand enlightened condition, but enlightenment now and now and now. It enables us to be selves – to be both immanent, to be that is, present with ourselves, and transcendent, that is less and less attached to these selves as they emerge from our storytelling.'
>
> (Wheway 1999)

He is describing something that accords with my own ontology – a way of being present in my own experience and, *at the same time*, not being attached to my sense of self.

Reflecting on my own experience in this way is also significant to the epistemology of my study. Understanding that a simple determination to change does not usually lead to change is of vital importance and central to a conclusion that I draw towards the end of this study. Often being determined to change means that we do not accept ourselves and this leads to us unconsciously digging in our heals. I show how I have found that the non-defensive use of reflection on our experience, as we experience it, within dialogue with others, can work best when meeting across difference in culture (see below in this chapter and chapter 7).

Non-dualistic thinking

My stance in relation to change also implies an ontological position in which the world is not seen dualistically. If we have a non-dualistic stance, change is not seen as a matter of making a simple decision to change or not to change. It is much more complex than that. This more complex non-dualistic thinking is important to my inquiry, as it is in action research generally. Dualistic thinking has informed western philosophy over many centuries as I show below and eventually allowed the west to proceed with a project of colonisation which is justified by seeing the colonised as an inferior type of human being.

To question dualistic thinking it is helpful to understand what Bateson has described as an 'epistemological error' (Bateson 1982:454). This error occurs when we understand individuals to be the basic unit of society. He suggests that it is rather the '*organism* plus *environment*' (Bateson 1982:459 italics in the original). His notion arises out of a philosophy that embraces a pre-Newtonian view in which the subject is not seen as separate from the object. Newton and Descartes established the modern 'scientific' attitude that legitimates this way of cutting off mind from matter and body from soul and sees 'man's' (sic)

place in the world as separate from nature. It is a stance that sees 'mankind' as in dominion over nature, including our own errant unconscious thoughts (Freud 1973:109). While a non-dualistic stance is important to me and other contemporary psychotherapists, particularly the Intersubjectivists (See chapter 6), earlier psychotherapy theory and philosophising was in tune with its times, at the end of the Victorian era, in having a firmly dualistic stance. This seems to me to be important to mention here, as mainstream psychotherapy theorising tends to be unquestioningly dualistic in nature, particularly as Freud certainly saw human psychology in this way (Freud 1973).

Most psychotherapists tend to see the flourishing of the individual rather than that individual in the context of the group to be the aim of their work (Sue and Sue 1990:35) thus creating a split between the individual and society. Freud was a gigantic figure in psychotherapy and his influence still provides a touchstone for many psychotherapists today. They have developed his thinking further but the inherent dualism between self and environment has not been seriously questioned until the intersubjectivists came forward with their radical new proposals. Before describing their work in detail I need to explore a critique of dualism.

Origins of dualism

A dualistic stance seems to have arisen in the 'western' world as part of what Elias (1998:279) calls the 'civilising process'. This brought about an epistemology that makes artificial dualistic separations. I have found it useful to understand how this dualistic attitude arose as it helps to show how, for westerners, dualisms which include self/other, male/female etc also include civilised/primitive, black/white, us/them etc and lead to people identifying with one group whilst rejecting those they perceive to be on the opposite pole. This way of creating dualisms is important to notice, not only because of its relevance to my epistemology, but because this splitting process affects relationships across difference in race and culture and so is relevant to both the process and the content of my research.

To understand more about this non-dualistic stance I will explore some of the complex factors involved in the origins of dualistic thinking. Before Descartes and Newton articulated a rational place for 'man' in the universe, a dualistic way of thinking was already present within western culture (Elias 1998:280). It has been an integral part of our 'civilisation' for thousands of years, and is clearly seen in the texts of 'western' religions - Judaism, Christianity and Islam - where God chose 'man' to rule the earth. Elias (1994:47; Mennell and Goudsblom 1998:30) showed how the 'civilising process' has gradually put constraints on our ways of thinking and acting so that 'acceptable' behaviour distinguishes the 'correct' from 'incorrect' and edits out of our thinking that which we consider to be 'animalic' (Elias' word). This 'civilising process' has provided the building blocks of the dominant western culture which prevails globally today as it has for many hundreds of years (Elias 1998:68).

Abram (1996:145) takes us even further back to when language stopped being onomatopoeic to find the roots of dualism. Onomatopoeic language connects us more fully to the 'things' we name thus helping us to be more connected to our direct experience. The process of symbolisation was very much part of a 'civilising process' and has taken the western world further and further from the 'natural world'. Words now stand for something else, thus making a separation between our speech and our experience.

The psychoanalyst, Daniel Stern, (1985:162) who researched infant development, was of the opinion that the coming of language created an inevitable separation between ourselves and the immediacy of our experience. He described four 'senses of self' (Stern 1985:26) – the *emergent*, the *core,* the *subjective* and the *verbal.* Before the verbal sense of self is developed, the baby develops a sense of its own subjectivity and learns that it is possible to share this with others in a direct way through the mother's (or other carer's) attuned

responsiveness. The ability to know the other in a direct way tends to be lost when the ability to symbolise comes concurrent with the development of a verbal sense of self. Stern does not consider that each sense of self is superseded by the next one but that each one is added to the last, thus our emergent, core and subjective senses of self are still available to us even after the verbal sense of self is developed. He points out, however, that the verbal sense of self is so powerful that it tends to dominate the others and cuts us off from more direct experiencing (Stern 1985:177).

Effects of dualistic and non-dualistic thinking

Plumwood (1993) shows how dualistic philosophy subtly ensures that dominant ideas are kept in place by associating the more powerful side of dualistic structures with each other. These keep the female on the weaker side of this difference (as 'female' is perceived as less powerful than 'male') but also puts those outside western culture in this same weaker group. She says:

> 'in systematised forms of power, power is normally institutionalised and 'naturalised' by latching on to existing forms of difference. Dualisms are not just freefloating systems of ideas; they are closely associated with domination and accumulation and are [western culture's] major cultural expressions and justifications." (Plumwood 1993:42)

If we take a non-dualistic epistemology on the other hand, we can constantly question the way we live in the light of experience rather than accept dualistically fixed ideas. We are therefore less likely to leave dualistic assumptions unexamined. Once we have accepted a non-dualistic epistemology, ways of knowing are freed from their binds. This way of knowing helps us to challenge the simple dualisims that can dominate our thinking and lead to us projecting on to others our difficult feelings and experiences, thus not having to own these experiences ourselves. Maybe this way of splitting ourselves goes some way to

explain the way the west seems to be so unquestioning about the way it dominates globally. Plumwood points out that:

> 'by means of dualisms, the colonised are appropriated, incorporated, into the selfhood and culture of the master, which forms their identity.' (Plumwood 1993:41)

Challenging dualistic thinking and allowing my own thinking to go beyond this way of splitting into 'good' and 'bad' is very important for the epistemology with which I approach this study. I constantly need to recognise when I make simple dualistic assumptions. In chapter 6, for example, I describe my work with refugee clients and know how easy it is to make simplistic assumptions about their lives based on dualistic thinking.

Conclusion

In both my practice as an action researcher and as a psychotherapist my ontology leads me to understand myself as being part of a co-created universe which is non-dualistic in nature. My epistemology flows directly from this: knowledge is co-created in a complexly pattered web of relating. Methodologies must be chosen with this in mind.

It is important to underline here that the content of this study is inextricably linked to how I study it. I study 'whiteness' and it is dualism that keeps whites in their place of power and, as they are on the powerful side of a black/white dualism, is also central to positivistic research. In challenging white supremacy, I am also challenging dualism and choose a non-dualistic epistemology to do it. To do so I need to recognise life as a 'seamless web' (Bateson 1982). Bateson acknowledged that, because we are human and think in the way that we do, we must inevitably apply analytic scissors to this web in order to live the life we can understand and reflect upon (Bateson and Bateson 1987:145). By this he meant that, although all is connected and whole

rather than in parts, we, being human, inevitably see the world in separate pieces – we cut the seamless web in order to understand it.

These scissors cut more easily in some places than others so that, for instance, we recognise a tree from non-tree by applying these 'scissors', just as we recognise 'being in a session' with our clients as opposed to 'not being in a session'. The boundaries we put round 'being in a session' allow us to explore in a certain way which we could not allow outside the session time. The cutting of the cloth here helps us to find a reflective space. Similarly, the concept of 'race' is one which has been cut out by these analytic scissors. However I am here challenging the notion that it is useful to cut the cloth in this way as many of the assumptions behind this cutting lead to pain and untold injustice. A very good example of this difficulty occurred in South Africa during apartheid where it was found that it was far from a simple matter to assign 'races' to people. Many apparently 'white' people were classified as 'black' as they had 'black' relatives.

A more holistic way of understanding experienced reality and our place within it, has been described by Reason (1994) as a 'participatory worldview'. The usual boundaries between different activities in our lives tend to break down when viewed with the perspective of this epistemology. In particular I understand that *I cannot view any part of the world without myself affecting it.* This idea is central both to my work as an action researcher in this study and as a psychotherapist. When reflecting on my work I view it with this in mind so that I know that any experience I have is profoundly affected by my own presence and perspective. How I understand this for myself is that I do not *do* research, I *am* research. I cannot say that part of my life is especially reserved for research. My life is an inquiry (Marshall 2001:433) and any part of it may be interesting and relevant enough to reflect upon and write about in this study. The 'analytic scissors' may choose various activities as being more relevant such as doing this writing, taking part in a co-operative inquiry group, reading about methodology, working with a

client who is an asylum seeker from Somalia or running a course called *Working with Difference* but anything such as walking down the street and noticing that a thought I have is based on a prejudiced assumption or is designed to bolster a favourite presupposition is also a valid part of my inquiry. What makes it research is an inquiring and reflective attitude and a formal process of presenting it beyond my private thoughts.

These thoughts on my ontology and epistemology indicate the profound change which I have undergone since being exposed to Bateson's work and that of the intersubjectivists in particular. They are the fertile ground from which my methodology arises as well as the related reflection on validity. It is to these that I now turn in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY AND VALIDITY

We have been dilettantes and amateurs
With some of the greatest notions
For human betterment.
We have been like spoilt children:
We have been like tyrannical children;
We have been impatient and imperious
Demanding proof when listening is required,
Tearing things down when they don't do
What we want them to do.
From *Mental Fight* by Ben Okri

In this chapter I set out the methods that I have used in my study and the ways in which I consider this methodology to be valid. Before looking at the specific methods I have used, I explore some of the underlying ideas on which they are based. Following this I look at the way that the concept of *dialogue* underlies these methods and has a bearing on my inquiry before exploring relevant validity issues.

Action research

As I have shown in chapter one, action research, and therefore my inquiry, is based on non-dualistic, participatory philosophy and, as such, has developed methods which are congruent with this departure point. This philosophy accepts, most importantly, that the researcher cannot be separated from the field of research. If this is the case then we cannot have 'researchers' and 'subjects' but only 'co-researchers' (Reason 1994). We cannot be objective as our presence makes us always part of the field of inquiry.

The use of questions

The initial stage of this kind of inquiry is the honing of a 'quality question' (Hawkins 2004). Indeed the first part of an action inquiry is to find and

deepen our questions. As I showed in the Introduction to this thesis, the purpose is not to find an answer but to find out more about the question and see how it leads to the discovery of fresh questions. Although, of course, some provisional answers are found, they are always contingent and may soon be out of date. My own questions in this inquiry evolved as follows:

1. 'How can I best go about understanding further my own relationship to cultural difference?' changed to
2. 'Can I as a white woman and psychotherapist meaningfully engage in dialogue with people of colour?'

When I go into a question it begins to change. But what does 'going into' a question mean? For me it means holding the question in awareness whilst I experience my life (Moustakis 1990:43). For instance when my question was 'How can I best go about understanding further my own relationship to cultural difference?' I did various things:

- I brought the question overtly to the attention of my supervision group (at CARPP) and my friends and colleagues. Particularly in relation to the supervision group I was specifically challenged to concentrate more on myself as a white woman.
- I reflected in writing. This included a piece about being English and brought home to me the sense of guilt I carry about being white and English and thereby part of a people that have benefited by dominating others. This is further reflected upon in a piece specifically about guilt and shame (see ch 6).
- I carry it about with me in my everyday life. I notice my attitudes and assumptions more often and it leads to acting and relating differently. For example I commented in a group that I had assumed all the white people in the group were English. Often I make a note of this in a diary or notes of sessions so that I can refer to it when I write up at a later date.

Finally it led to changing my question to a third one:

1. 'How can I as a white person and psychotherapist understand my own place in a diverse world where white people dominate'.

This question has become the one that is most basic to my inquiry.

Cycles of Action and Reflection

The changes to my inquiry question are examples of what in action research are called 'cycles of inquiry'. In these we act, then reflect and then act again in the light of that reflection (Heron and Reason 2001:179). Of course the action and the reflection are not always clearly separated. Action and reflection often intertwine. Deciding to talk to another in a reflective manner may also be a form of action but the elements of action, reflection and further action in the light of that reflection must be present for the endeavour to be called Action Research.

I find that the Learning Cycle described by Kolb (1984) is useful for understanding why the apparently simple notion of cycles of action and reflection is so powerful, particularly when put together with Argyris and Schon's (1978) notion of single and double loop learning (see below). Kolb's learning cycle leads from concrete experience to reflective observation to abstract conceptualisation to active experimentation and that leads again to concrete experience. This cycle shows the process that is gone through from the practical experience through reflection to a change in action.

Argyris and Schon (1978) developed a similar theory of learning which involved both 'single loop learning' and 'double loop learning'. In single loop learning action and reflection lead to further learning that is completed within a single, coherent frame of reference. In double loop learning, the second loop reflects on the first learning loop in a way that explores its attitudes, values and assumptions. This second loop ensures that the learning is deepened beyond the most obvious layer. It is the second loop that actually digs below a question and finds new

ones. Adherence to the single loop alone may lead to finding an efficient way of behaving but does not lead to new understandings. For instance, in relation to my first question mentioned above, I might have found politically correct ways of staying out of hot water by adhering to a single loop but would not have understood myself within the field I was studying. I would only have changed my behaviour but not the context in which my behaviour arose so that any change would be superficial and would not have led to any real changes to my basic 'organising principles' (Stolorow and Atwood 1992).

In developing this theory Argyris and Schon were influenced by Bateson's levels of learning (Bateson 1982:257) in which the perspective of each level can be viewed from a new place. Hawkins (1991), also influenced by Bateson's levels of learning, extended this further to include 'treble loop learning'[6] in which the new paradigm of the double loop can itself be reflected upon. Treble loop learning brings an attitude in which there is less personal attachment to an outcome and a sense of the greater, transpersonal purpose served by the learning in the first two loops. Interestingly his prompt to find a third loop came from Argyris' lament that double loop learning was so rarely found within organisations (Hawkins 2004). Hawkins (1991) recalled that Bateson (1982:275) had said that each level of learning could only be understood from the level above. That meant that the double loop was unlikely to occur without a perspective from a possible third loop. The implication for me is that it is important for me to be open to a sense of a greater purpose for my work.

Inquiries that use cycles of action and reflection can also be understood in terms of single, double and treble loops (Bradbury and Reason 2001). Here are examples:

[6] In Hawkins' original he used the term 'treble loop learning'. Others including Torbert have called it 'triple loop learning' (Torbet, W. R. 2001:250)

- A single loop cycle is one in which the inquiry keeps within its own frame of reference. *An example from this study is my finding a 'politically correct' way to change my behaviour.*
- A double loop cycle is one in which a new perspective on the whole inquiry cycle is found. *In this study I have shown how questions changed through allowing a reflective stance in my life.*
- A triple loop cycle is one in which the whole is seen within a spiritual context with less attachment to ego concerns and a greater purpose found.

Bateson shows how learning level three on which the treble loop is based is 'difficult and even rare in human beings' (Bateson 1982:274) and an experience of it is almost impossible to describe except maybe through the use of poetry, so I hesitate either to claim such an experience or to describe it! It is not something we can 'make' happen. We can say it happens 'by grace' (Hawkins 2002). In other words it happens not because we deserve it or have worked for it but because we are open to receive. This openness to receive may be facilitated by spiritual practices such as mediation but if we undertake them *in order* to achieve anything we are paradoxically not likely to do so. We can only be open and suspend expectation.

In applying this idea of single, double and treble loop cycles to my own inquiry, I can see that I started by trying to understand how I could improve my practice when working across cultural difference. I understood at the beginning that this involved understanding my own cultural standpoint. However when I began to see that the whole inquiry was about *being white* rather than understanding others, there was a shift of perspective. I was aware of what Hawkins describes as making a 'shift not only in where we are looking but also in how we are looking.' (Hawkins 1991). It involved being less task-orientated and allowing a shift of consciousness to take place in which such a change of perspective could happen. This could only occur when I was able, as I

show in the example below, to drop a defensive stance to those who challenged me, and became clearer about the overall purpose of the research being about whiteness, my one essential departure point. The example is as follows:

An exploration of a 'moment' in the White Cooperative Inquiry Group
This piece explores a 'moment' in my white cooperative inquiry group in which I show double and singe single loop learning. The places marked with an * show where the learning changed to a double loop.

Richard, a member of the White co-operative inquiry group, says he lives in a black neighbourhood but does not engage with black people. On thinking about this after the group is over I decide that it might be interesting to ask the question 'what do you feel at the prospect of initiating a conversation with a black person you meet in the street?' I decide to suggest to the group (possibly on the email) that we all think about this question before the next group. Before I have a chance to suggest this to the group I mention it to the university supervision group. The white people in the group understand my posing this question as a way of suggesting that each of us might go about doing first person research into our own responses. The black person thinks I mean that it would be helpful to intercultural relations to do so and questions this.

I mentioned this occurrence in the group to Peter who said he suspected that between Richard's comment and my suggestion there were several stages which I missed out and am largely unaware of which the black group member may have picked up on. My first response was defensive but then I began to see what he meant. I decided to try and find those stages by slowing down the process.*
Here is my attempt:

- *Richard says he lives in a black neighbourhood but does not speak to black people and wonders why not*
- *I feel a resonance in myself. I have lived in black neighbourhoods and not known many black people. Others also seem to resonate with this. There is a murmured understanding. Someone else says they are in the same situation.*

- *After the group this piece of conversation stays with me.*
- *The question of what 'action' might happen in an action research group also stays with me.*
- *In thinking about and emotionally remembering the moment about the black neighbourhood it strikes me as having something of a 'nub' about it. I wonder why this is the case. I think about behaving differently and realise that I feel afraid. I wouldn't know how to approach someone that I didn't know. Would it be appropriate anyway? Would it be felt as patronising? If it was for my needs why should the black person engage with me?*
- *These thoughts are all had very quickly, almost out of awareness.*
- *I have the thought that we might all engage with considering what it would be like to approach a black person and see what comes up.*
- *Peter thinks that a more interesting question is 'How can I engage in my multicultural neighbourhood?*
- *I think: maybe a prior question is: 'Do I want to engage in my multicultural neighbourhood? Or maybe 'How much do I want to engage in my multicultural neighbourhood'.*
- *How did I arrive at that thought? I thought: That question assumes that I want to.*
- *I say to Peter that I have a tendency to jump stages and make intuitive or undeclared leaps.**
- *Peter wonders if these are okay in psychotherapy but not in action research.*
- *I think: although in psychotherapy much of the work is done through registering and working with felt responses, the best work is done when the process is slowed down to understand them better. I am best able to do this when I feel good about myself. I can then be open to correction without loss of self-esteem. Detailed study then becomes interesting and I can move between self-states (playful child, attuned mother, concerned friend, academic, therapist etc) smoothly.*
- *Here was another leap. Lynne Jacobs suggests that we become dissociated (fixed into one self-state) and rigid in our thinking when we feel under threat – often through feeling shamed. I am suggesting here that detailed exploration of any particular 'moment' is not only part of the discipline of action research, but also of psychotherapy and that that is what supervision encourages. Someone else can 'play' with you in*

discovering more about a situation. A sense of play loosens our attachment to an outcome and helps ensure that we don't dissociate. That is why it is so important not to shame people in supervision but to encourage a sense of play.

Having been through this process I can see that the thought of the member of the supervision group who was black was more to the point.' *October 2002*

I have marked by an asterisk two places where I think I allowed myself to push past a defensive stance. It is hard to describe what is involved in this but it is a moment where I allow myself to let go of my narcissistic self and know that I am just a participant in a larger dance. This allows me to question my own assumptions because I am less caught up with appearing to be correct. On re-reading it I find that I do not quite follow the logic of understanding more clearly at the end that the black member 'had a point'. Although I think this may not be logical, I also know that somewhere, just out of awareness at the time, I knew, in the way I describe above, that my insisting on good co-operative inquiry grounds for suggesting this line of inquiry into thoughts about approaching black people was defensive. I had, in fact, hoped it might lead to 'better relationships'. My thoughts given here in relation to what I wrote last October are an example of another cycle of the process.

First, second and third person research

Questions can initiate inquiry processes which then occur in the arenas of one's own self inquiry, an inquiry with co-researchers or research within the wider world. Several action research authors (Heron 1996; Reason and Bradbury 2001:xxv; Torbert 2001:251 - 257) have termed these modes, first, second and third person research.

Methodologies that incorporate these three have been important in my inquiry as they encompass those that ensure that my research includes my own self-reflection as well as reflection with others in small and large groups. It is not always easy to mark definite differences between the three as the borders between them can be hazy but making these definitions helps us to more rigorously understand the context in which

our research happens. It helps us to understand how far our own private experience informs our inquiry (first person research), how far a collaboration with other individuals informs it (second person research) and how far it operates in society at large (third person research).

First and second person research

First person inquiry is a *personal* exploration. Here a reflective attitude is taken to the experiences which address our own inquiry questions, as I show above (Marshall 2002). First person research may nevertheless involve others in challenging and supporting us, thus helping us to reflect and generate fresh perspectives. It is also important to remember that first person research is carried out within an intersubjective field, so arises from this field and in turn has an effect upon it. First person research can never, then, only be about us as individual, 'isolated minds' (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992).

I have found that involving others has forced me to move from single loop to double loop learning in that it has helped me to fundamentally question my own perspective. I have had a number of conversations with others during the course of my research and some of these are analysed in this thesis, particularly in chapter 6 where I have had conversations with people who have collaborated with me in work within organisations.

The inquiry becomes second person research when the others involved can in some way be called co-researchers. In second person research two or more people share inquiry questions or questions that relate to the inquiry. Usually this involves a formal inquiry process such as a co-operative inquiry group (Reason 1998; Reason and Bradbury 2001). As I have shown in chapter 1, action research, because of its non-dualistic way of understanding the world, does not accept the notion of a researcher having 'subjects' on which the research is carried out. Action researchers regard all involved both as researchers and subjects. Ideally all decide on the field of inquiry, how it is to be studied and use themselves, their experience and the dialogue between them as the

'subject' of the study. When these conditions are met, then a co-operative inquiry can take place. I have undertaken second person research through a co-operative inquiry group which explored the experience of being white. This is further discussed below and in chapter 4.

Various issues have been identified by Ladkin (2004) which show how the way that co-operative inquiry groups run is very complex and throws up dilemmas which are not always easy to resolve. Issues of leadership and ownership of the inquiry may be present however carefully it is set up, and this is certainly something I have found, as is discussed in chapter 4. Similarly conversations and interaction I have had with others could not be definitely called second person research as the questions concerned were clearly my own and no formal inquiry process was set up. My initial impetus for talking to other people was to foster and encourage my own inquiry. Maybe, as I intimated in the Introduction, this inquiry involving others could be called 'an extended first person inquiry' as the thoughts fostered in those with whom I interacted could potentially spark a first person research inquiry of their own whilst also contributing to my understanding. The dynamics of bringing new understanding may well have arisen 'between' us in an intersubjective inquiry even if a formal inquiry process was not set up.

I also employed the methodologies of questionnaires and interviews to stimulate reflection. I describe these below.

Third Person Research

I engaged in third person inquiry as part of my research, particularly in relation to my work within The Bath Centre for Psychotherapy and Counselling (BCPC). This work has shown how my inquiry addresses wider societal issues and ones that relate to the psychotherapy profession as a whole. The work with this organisation is described in chapter 7.

I have found that third person research is often more challenging and gritty and seems to be less likely to be collusive than second person research. It brings an extra dimension to the learning, however painful and disturbing (Brown and Clough 1989:33).

Avoiding collusion in the inquiry process

Third person research often cuts through our defences in a way in which smaller, more personal groups may not, where the danger of collusion is greater. Reason and Rowan (1981:245) have suggested several ways of cutting down on collusive behaviour in small co-operative inquiry groups in their discussion of validity issues in collaborative research. They show how constant reflection on experience and a good level of self knowledge should allow for sufficient questioning of collusive processes

Third person research is often not as collusive and therefore far from comfortable, particularly if it involves working with large groups (Brown and Clough 1989:33) but, if we are able to take the learning from it, is often very profound. Nevertheless, as is suggested by Reason and Bradbury (2001) above, good second and third person research should also be based on rigorous first person inquiry.

In the preface to their edited book A Handbook of Action Research, Reason and Bradbury (2001:xxvi) say:

> 'We suggest that the most compelling and enduring kind of action research will engage all three strategies: first-person research practice is best conducted in the company of friends and colleagues who can provide support and challenge; such a company may indeed evolve into a second-person collaborative inquiry process. On the other hand attempts at third-person collaborative research which are not based in rigorous first person inquiry into one's purposes and practices are open to distortion through unregulated bias.'

Each context for the research (first, second or third person) can help us to reflect more rigorously on the one before it. In their paper *When First Person Inquiry is not Enough,* the European-American Cooperative 'Challenging Whiteness' (2004) show how they used the support of a co-operative inquiry group to help deepen the reflection of each others' first person inquiry. Second person research, then, can help us to engage in double loop learning in our first person research because others are better placed to see our blind spots and to fundamentally challenge our assumptions. Treble loop learning gives the learning a spiritual perspective in which a wider purpose appears.

Specific methods used in the study

Having explored the underlying principles in the previous chapter and various practices behind my methodology - including questions, cycles of action and reflection and the arenas of first, second and third person research - I now set out three specific methods that I used. They are:

- Co-operative Inquiry
- Interviews
- Questionnaires
- Diaries and other contemporary accounts of my experience

The way I have used all these methods is congruent with the principles and practices that I have outlined above.

Co-operative Inquiry

Co-operative inquiry was specifically designed by action researchers (Heron 1981:19) to provide a compatible methodology. It is one which accepts that the researcher is part of the 'field' (Reason 1994:10) so that all involved in the inquiry are accepted as 'co-researchers' rather than researchers and subjects.

A co-operative inquiry may be initiated by an individual or by a group of individuals. If an individual wishes to undertake an inquiry they may find others who are interested in the same endeavour and set up a co-operative inquiry to research the area. This was how my own co-operative inquiry was set up. However a group may be formed because, as a group, they were interested in a particular inquiry and decide together to use co-operative inquiry methodology. A group may also decide on a line of inquiry and employ a specialist in action research to facilitate the group (See inquiry carried our with health visitors, for example (Traylen 1994)).

However the group is set up, it is important that all those involved in the inquiry share both the inquiry questions and how the inquiry will be undertaken using this research methodology. Within the basic tenets of co-operative inquiry, groups are free to go about their inquiry as they wish so long as co-operative inquiry principles are applied. The most basic of these is that of cycles of action and reflection. The word 'action' may be interpreted widely to include actions taken within the group such as an exercise or a discussion, or outside the group such as undertaking a particular activity. Then, in the group, this is reflected upon by group members and this reflection leads to further action.

In my own co-operative inquiry group several ways of acting and reflecting were used. These included

- the use of structured exercises which were carried out both within and outside the group
- discussions in which 'action', such as discovering an attitude or assumption, were then reflected upon by the group.
- After the termination of the group a further cycle of action and reflection was carried out in the form of an interview of each participant. The detail of this is in Chapter 4.

The use of co-operative inquiry has been an important part of my research and the learning which arose within the group has led to several of my conclusions.

Interviews

I used interviews as a method when I felt the need to take my inquiry to others whilst not expecting them to join with me in *my* inquiry. I have called this type of inquiry *extended first person inquiry* (see above). There were various circumstances within my inquiry when I have felt the need to use interviews as follows:

- When the original experience on which I was drawing was carried out with others and I wished to check out my own experience against theirs. An example of this is in chapter 7 where I draw on material gleaned in working within an organisation with colleagues. The way they experienced certain events contributed to validating my own experience (see Chapter 7).
- After the termination of the co-operative inquiry group I interviewed group members to ask them to reflect back on their experience within the group (see Chapter 4).
- Following the use of a questionnaire I interviewed some of my respondents in order to better understand their responses or to ask them to reflect further on a matter that particularly interested me. An example is my interview of a particular respondent who used 'politically incorrect' language and I wanted to better understand her use of certain words (see Chapter 5).

I regard my use of interviews as part of my first person inquiry because my respondents have not 'bought into' the full process and

my motivation for carrying out the interview is to better understand something myself. My methodology for interviews is not to tightly structure them other than by identifying key questions and lines of inquiry. I let the interview go in unexpected directions whilst being guided by the principles of dialogue (see below) (Moustakis 1990:47).

In order to make use of the information gathered from my interviews I first of all wrote them up in one of two ways:

1. by transcribing a tape
2. by writing an account using notes made at the time and on the day following the interview and checking them with people who were present at the interview.

Having made a written account of the interview I read it through, immersing myself in what I read and experienced (Moustakis 1990:49). I picked out aspects which seem most relevant to me:

- parts that further my inquiry question
- points that challenge my inquiry question
- points that seem to have a particular emotional charge.

The last point is interesting as it is similar to that which would particularly interest me as a psychotherapist as it indicates that something important to the speaker is being expressed. Years of experience as a psychotherapist have particularly sensitized me to these moments which elicit an echoing embodied response of my own. I am used to considering these responses to try to understand what they mean. Having immersed myself for a second time, this time on my own responses as well as on the original notes (Moustakis 1990:51), I am ready to start to understand how the material relates to my inquiry. An example can be found on Page 127 where I interviewed 'Alice' about her associations to the word 'white'. I show

here how Alice's responses deepen my own understanding and relate to Dalal's theoretical formulations (Dalal 2002). Alice's response to my questions and mine to her, including bringing a theoretical concept to bear on what I have heard, helps me to think further and with more complexity about my inquiry.

Questionnaires

My use of questionnaires is also part of my first person inquiry although I hope that my respondents found the inquiry useful for themselves. As I explain in Chapter 4, I did not use questionnaires to gain statistically valid data, but to broaden the picture I hold of a question. Rather than try to make the 'sample' statistically valid, I chose people from my email address book who I thought would be interested in thinking about the issues (in this case about shame and guilt) and were likely to have already reflected on these issues. I do not consider the 'findings' to have 'proved' anything either. They did, however, widen my thinking beyond my own thoughts and imagination and indicated lines of inquiry. I was also able to follow these up by interviewing respondents.

I wanted the questionnaires to be specific enough to give me data which was relevant to my questions but open ended enough to give the respondents the opportunity to give truthful and idiosyncratic answers without having to squeeze themselves into a pre-formed box which can only arise from my own preconceptions. I was aware that I was asking busy people to give time to their answers and so, with the second one, I gave the respondents the option of replying on a graded scale of 1 – 3 whilst also suggesting they reply more fully in writing as well if they wished.

Having received the replies I put them all together (see appendices 6 and 8) and, as with my method of analyzing interviews, I immersed myself in the responses. I pulled out similarities and differences, things that surprised me and answers that I expected to find. I then

pondered the meaning of these findings and started to put my first thoughts in writing. As with interviews I gave further thought to this analysis and, through immersing myself again, began the process of coming to an understanding of how they further my inquiry (See chapter 5). More thoughts about my use of questionnaires and why they were devised in the way that they were are to be found within Chapter 5 where I have made use of them.

Diaries and other contemporary accounts of my experience

Over the period of my research I have kept some diary account of my experience, notes about my work including my work with clients and my reading and emails and letters to colleagues and friends. These contemporary accounts have given me data which has allowed me to track some of the processes I have gone through during the course of my inquiry. By looking back at these accounts I can not only see how my thinking has changed and developed over time and track the experiences that have been formative in my thinking over the last seven or more years, I can also reflect on that writing in order to better understand my learning process (Winter 1999:16).

I have accessed these accounts for use in my inquiry in two ways. Firstly I have read them over in preparation for writing so that I am aware of what is available to me and secondly I have been reminded of something I have formulated in the course of writing my thesis. I often find that it provides illustrative evidence of a development of my thinking. In many ways this is like going back and finding part of a process frozen in time. Occasionally I come across a piece of writing in a serendipitous way such as finding a piece that I wrote just before the start of my inquiry as I was writing the Conclusion (see page 287).

I often find that several 'turns' of the cycle of action and reflection can be present when working with these texts as follows:

1. My writing puts me in mind of a diary entry or previous piece of material. (This may or may not be one that has been read in

preparation for this piece.) It may illustrate or shed light on my theme or show how my process has developed over time.

2. I find the piece of writing and reflect on the meaning that it contains. I may, as on page 55, analyse the text to show how my inquiry is contained within it.
3. I include my reflections by writing a part of the thesis and, having shaped the new piece, I reflect on that for some time and either clarify what I have written or add a further response which contributes to another cycle of action on that reflection. This process is repeated until I am satisfied with the writing.

Reflective writing has been an important part of my inquiry and working on the draft of this thesis has provided one of the arenas in which I have undertaken this process. It has provided a reflective space in which I can respond to previous written reflections.

Dialogue as an underlying methodology

In all three of these methodologies, dialogue is their vital heart. The quality of the dialogue is all important in determining the usefulness and validity of these methods (see below). Dialogue is itself valid if those in dialogue are sincere in their desire to be open to the other (see Bohm (1980) and Buber(2004) below). It follows therefore that the possibility that my conclusions are valid rests on the openness of the dialogue which generates information and insight. Furthermore, I regard the way I carry our psychotherapy to be imbued with a sense of dialogue (Hycner and Jacobs 1995) so it is within dialogue as an underlying methodology that my research and my psychotherapy practice converge. It is also very applicable in working across difference in culture as, in dialogue, there is a genuine attempt to meet and understand those differences and stresses the equal participation of both partners. (Gustavsen 2002:17). Because of the importance of dialogue I have discussed it in detail below.

Dialogue is a methodology that is vital to action research as it is a form of conversation in which participants listen to themselves as well as to the other. In fact it is hard for me to imagine good action research in which the researcher is not always dialogic as an action researcher is interested in hearing others whilst also being self-reflective (Marshall 2002:433). Dialogue involves us in listening and understanding, it involves us in really hearing what is being communicated even if we think we disagree, even if we think the speaker represents something we thoroughly disapprove of or seems inexplicably different to us.

Particularly if there is a power difference between us, we are only truly in dialogue if we are listening without forming a riposte or even a reply. We will be listening in order to understand thoroughly and in order to really do this we may need to check out that we have understood as deeply and as correctly as we can.

Having listened we respond and when we respond we do so by giving our thoughts and feelings to the speaker, thoughts that have been sparked by what has been said. We are prepared to be hesitant or wrong or foolish because we are more interested in our questions than in being right. We may be able to think: 'can my question be deepened by hearing what this person has to say?' And 'can my understanding be deepened?' These are important considerations if we are to remain dialogic and ones that I bear in mind as a psychotherapist. They are equally important for action researchers.

Because dialogue is so important in all my methodologies I have decided to explore in some depth three theorists – Bohm, Buber and Habermas. I have particularly chosen Bohm's ideas about dialogue (Bohm 1996) because he explores the way in which dialogue can be brought to bear on the culture and help to bring about change. I include Habermas (1984) because he describes validity tests for true communication and this has a bearing on dialogue. He also draws attention to ethical issues when there is a difference in power between

the parties. Buber (2004) stresses the importance of mutuality in a way I consider to be very profound.

Bohm

Bohm has been an important influence on me, not so much because he provides a methodology for working across difference but because he sees dialogue as essential in changing cultural patterns of thought (Bohm 1996:28). His ideas help me as, if I am to challenge the assumptions of white people, then Bohm offers an approach to dialogue which engages with how we might go about this. Bohm developed the notion of 'dialogue' in response to what he sees as the intractable problem of 'incoherent cultural assumptions' in our society today (Bohm 1996:28 and 29). He sees these problems as potentially leading to society's falling apart as the cultural 'cement' of shared meanings is largely absent. Bohm points out that in our society 'everybody has different assumptions and opinions' (Bohm 1996:8). He seems to be suggesting that it would be healthier to work towards us being able to encompass mutual assumptions in order that we have a stronger sense of shared meanings. In order to be able to do this he explicates that it is important to *understand* our assumptions. On this basis we would understand each other better (Bohm 1996:9). Maybe he is saying that it is better to be aware of our own and others' assumptions than to share them.

In his book *Wholeness and the Implicate Order,* Bohm (1980) describes a way of understanding the world as an 'unbroken wholeness of the totality of existence as an undivided flowing movement without borders.' (1980:172). Within white, western culture we are far from understanding existence in this way. He seems to be hoping that dialogue will expose what Bateson calls the 'epistemological error' of western society (Bateson 1982:454) when he talks of the way that dialogue will uncover our assumptions. As I previously discussed, the thinking in current western culture holds an implicit belief in the

analytical mind that divides the world into dualistic opposites including the agency of our own individuality.

Bohm suggests that mistaken epistemology is embedded in our culture and that culture is expressed within our habits of thought and ways of thinking. I have already discussed his useful distinction between 'thought' and 'thinking' in Chapter 1. He shows how dialogue in which we *really* listen to ourselves and to others, does allow the assumptions embedded within our thinking to be consciously experienced:

> 'The point is that dialogue has to go into all the pressures that are behind our assumptions. It goes into all the process of thought *behind* the assumptions, not just the assumptions themselves.' (Bohm 1996:9)[7]

He says we are largely unaware of this process and suggests we could develop a way of being 'proprioceptive' in our thinking (aware as it happens) so that we can really experience the tie-up between intellectual activity, feeling and bodily responses. This is reflected in the four features of valid dialogue that he puts forward as he says that in dialogue we must:

- bring a quality of awareness to our own responses,
- listen to the other whilst, at the same time, noticing our own responses,
- suspend assumptions – notice but neither believe nor disbelieve what we assume to be true,
- attempt to make thought 'proprioceptive'.

Bohms views on dialogue and particularly these features of valid dialogue have been very useful to me in my research as they provide a

[7] Maybe Bohm is drawing on a similar distinction to my own here when I say that assumptions are structured by organising principles.

touchstone for deciding whether or not my own dialogue in pursuance of my inquiry is valid.

Buber

Although Buber tends not to use the term 'dialogue' himself he has been an important influence on me and on other psychotherapists who do use them (Hycner and Jacobs 1995). Buber's use of dialogue is particularly important in connection with what he calls the *I-Thou* (Buber 1958). Buber considers that there are two 'primary words': *I-it* and *I-thou*. He says:

> Primary words do not signify things, but they intimate relationships. Primary words do not describe something that might exist independently of them, but being spoken they bring about existence..... If *thou* is said, the *I* of the combination *I-thou* is said along with it. If *it* is said the *I* of the combination *I-it* is said along with it. The primary word *I-thou* can only be spoken with the whole being. The primary word *I-it* can never be spoken with the whole being (Buber 2004:11).

For Buber, then, the *I-thou* relationship involves the whole being. (Buber 2004:52) Dialogic Gestalt therapists turn to Buber as he shows that when we relate from *I-it* we are doing so from the world of separation. There is a similarity here to Stern's verbal sense of self described above. *I-it* belongs to the world of things whereas in the *I-thou* relationship we are connected to the other. *Thou* automatically includes the *I*. He says:

> If I face a human being as my *Thou*, and say the primary word *I-thou* to him, he is not a thing among things, and does not consist of things. Thus human being is not *He* or *She*, bounded from every other *He* and *She*, a specific point in space and time within the net of the world; nor is he by nature able to be experienced and described, a loose bundle of named qualities.

> But with no neighbour, and whole in himself, he is *Thou* and fills the heavens. (Buber 2004:15)

From this passage we can see that Buber has a non-dualistic epistemology, similar to that which I have described in Chapter 1.

There is some controversy about whether therapists can ever relate to clients as *I-Thou*, and therefore be in real dialogue in Buber's terms, as, he says, the therapeutic relationship can never really be mutual in that the therapist is in a different role to the client. Buber sees mutuality as a necessary condition for *I-Thou* relating (Buber 2004:94). That therapists and clients can never meet in the mutuality of the *I-thou* was famously contested by Rogers in a public dialogue with Buber (Kirschenbaum and Land Henderson 1989:48) in which Buber refused to accept that there could ever be equality within the therapy relationship. In fact in a postscript to the 2004 edition of *I and Thou* (Buber 2004) Buber again questions that psychotherapy can ever be completely an *I-thou* relationship and finishes by saying:

> Every *I–thou* relationship, within a relation which is specified as a purposive working of one part upon the other, persists in virtue of a mutuality which is forbidden to be full (Buber 2004:99).

My own thought is that the fullness of knowing and experiencing *I-thou* is impeded by the lack of equality in the psychotherapy relationship but at some level a knowledge of connectedness (awareness of non-dualism) is always present and, because of that, we may dip into experiencing this level with our clients from time to time. This is made more likely by the intimacy that grows up between two people who are engaged in a task of revealing and discovering greater and greater levels of experiencing within their encounter. In less individualistically

orientated societies our connectedness is perhaps more easily known[8].

Habermas

Habermas's contributuion to my reflection on dialogue is particularly important since he discusse the way power differences distort communication. Because of how power differences are institutionally built into meetings between those of white, European origin and those of other origins, his ideas are particularly important for my thesis.

Habermas is a critical theorist who asserts that theory cannot be dislocated from practice and that human activity is always motivated by self interest. He asks us to find meaning through true communication.

I will explore two aspects of his work which have particular relevance to my thesis

1 His validity claims for 'true communication' (Habermas 1984:2)
2 Blocks to true communication that arise when there are power differences between those in communication. (Carr and Kemmis 1986)

Habermas contributed importantly to ideas about dialogue by advocating some 'validity claims' (Habermas 1984:2) in order to understand more clearly that which must be in place for a 'speech action' (Habermas 1984:2) to be truly communicative. They are as follows:

1. Uttering something understandably
2. Giving the hearer something to understand

The African notion of *ubuntu* which can be translated as 'I am because you are', seems a pertinent example as the word implies a knowledge of our interconnectedness

3. Making himself thereby understandable; and
4. Coming to an understanding with another person.

(Habermas 1984:2)

These validity claims ensure that something is truly communicated. This communication may be made at a cognitive or at an intersubjective[9] level (Habermas 1984:42). At the cognitive level or level of 'propositional contents', the focus is on what is being said. At the level of intersubjectivity we are more interested in how the communication lets us know more about our interpersonal relationship with the speaker.

Habermas imagined a 'base line' of 'undistorted' communication (Ritzer 1992:290) and was influenced by psychoanalysis in its attempts to help people free communication from distortion. He does not understand this distortion as emanating from repressed libidinal desires, as a psychoanalyst does, so much as by repressed oppressive societal pressures.

As we saw above, Habermas has been particularly influential in pointing out that power differences can 'systematically distort communication' (Habermas 1984:120) thereby affecting the validity claim of any particular piece of communication. Habermas influenced the intersubjective psychotherapists, Stolorow, Atwood and Orange (Stolorow 2002:115) with this idea. It is also at the heart of my study as I explore my own communicaton as a white person with those who are not white. As white people are institutionally the more powerful group I need to be aware of the way in which power difference may distort the dialogue. This power differences is compounded in psychotherapy as the psychotherapist is also in a more powerful position. I explore these issues in more detail below. For the purpose of this thesis, Habermas's 'true communication' and 'dialogue' seem to be interchangeable as

'dialogue' and 'true communication' *depend* on mutuality. Buber has said that *I-thou* (and therefore conditions for dialogue) do not occur where there is no mutuality (Buber 2004:98).

My own view is that power dynamics are always present at some level and in some degree in any relationship and so always need to be attended to if dialogue is to be attempted. If we insist that no power dynamics be present for dialogue to be possible and we take the view that power dynamics are always present, we are in danger of asserting that dialogue is never possible. My contention is that *the extent to which power dynamics are present, is the extent to which the potential to be in dialogue is endangered.* The validity claims that Habermas sees as essential become problematic, particularly the fourth one: 'Coming to an understanding with another person' (Habermas 1984:2), as that understanding could be distorted because of a pressure on either side to be coercive, compliant or rebellious. I have found in my practice that the only way of mitigating this situation is for the person who is in the more powerful position to name and acknowledge their position of power and its influence on the dialogue (see below for an example). This will allow a 'validity claim' for the communication as trust and credibility will have been increased (Habermas 1984:200). It is Habermas's contention that truth and justice can only be served if communication is freed from distortion in an 'ideal speech situation' (Ritzer 1992:292) in which his validity claims are met. I am not sure if Habermas ever expected this ideal situation to actually occur. My own sense is that we can only approach such a situation but rarely completely achieve it. Achieving his validity claims is a complex matter as the nuances of non-verbal communication and the myriad of ways in which communication can be very subtly distorted are always present.

[9] My understanding of Habermas's use of the word intersubjective here means that the focus of the communication is on the relationship between the two engaged in the communication rather than on the content of it.

Having acknowledged that, the validity of a dialogue is strengthened if the power dynamics of those in dialogue are thoroughly explored, thought about and *taken into account*. The outcome of the dialogue will be affected, but not necessarily in a straightforward way. If, for example, I have a conversation with someone who is in a powerful position in relation to me and they ask me to go for a walk I might agree although I have no wish to do so. If the power position is first well explored between us I could then choose not to go or to go in any case but not because I feel coerced into it.

An example of this occurred in my practice when I saw a refugee client who was a man of great means and importance in his country of origin. I have commented on his change of circumstances and on the recently occurring relative power difference between us. (He is not western European, like me, but he was a man of wealth and substance.) He comes to me for help and feels his change of circumstances: he used to be the one who helped others. I let him know that I recognise the powerful and influential man within him and want to understand how it feels for him to have lost his authority in coming to this country. Sometimes he shows me his utter despair and hopelessness and sometimes takes delight in telling me about his previous life. My sense is that it is important to him that I try my best, however imperfectly, to really see and understand him as a powerful human being if he is to really show me his despair. Within our communication we gradually work our way towards meeting Habermas's validity claims as we gradually understand each other more fully through the process of dialogue.

Comparing Bohm, Habermas and Buber

Although Bohm, Habermas and Buber all are very different they all help me to understand dialogic communication. Bohm helps me to rigorously understand what it is to be self-reflective, Habermas to think about what makes dialogue valid and to understand power dynamics

within the field and Buber deepens my feeling for spiritual connectedness.

If we add Bohm's to Habermas's ideas about communication we can see that they both look for ways in which dialogue or communication can make stronger validity claims so that true communication can be said to have occurred. It seems to me that it is not a simple matter as to whether or not 'true communication' has happened. As I said at the beginning of the previous chapter, I understand 'truth' to be emergent and contingent on the context. However, Habermas is more concerned to tease out the conditions in which communication actually occurs whereas Bohm is concerned about a type of reflective listening to the self he calls 'proprioception' in order that the outcome of the dialogue is one in which a rigorous questioning of assumptions can occur.

Methodologically these ideas are helpful as they provide benchmarks with which to assess how dialogic we are being. Buber then reminds us that real communication comes as if by grace if we are open to receive it like an empty vessel waiting to be filled.

Dialogue when working as a white psychotherapist across difference in culture

So how is this relevant to action research when working as a white psychotherapist across difference in culture? After all, when Bohm talks of making changes in the culture (Bohm 1996:16), he is talking of the predominant global culture of the west, not about dialoguing *between* cultures. He shows how, in western culture, analytic thinking (Bohm 1996:49) has taken precedence over intuitive, creative, lateral thinking. He hopes that, through the use of dialogue, we will lay bear the assumptions held within the culture so that they are not held without question.

It is my contention that dialogue is useful when trying to communicate across cultures as well as within them, as we will see below, and when

we do, power difference needs to be taken into account. After all, if we talk to someone who is very different to ourselves, then remembering to move towards dialogue rather than to argue can be an important way towards understanding and being understood.

If we are able to remain dialogic, we will notice what is going on in ourselves while the process is happening. If we find that we have a judgement about that, we notice that too. We bring a sense of witness to what is said so we have no expectations of a particular outcome. We want to learn more. We don't mind if our point of view doesn't 'win'. It is my contention that conversations of this sort are more likely to lead to a deepening of understanding where there is a difference rather than insisting on one's own view which is based upon one's own culturally mediated understanding. This is an important guiding principle for my inquiry and one that is constantly with me when working as a psychotherapist. Below is an example from my work:

> I work with a man who is sunk into a depression following his flight to England after having been very severely tortured in his country of origin. His experiences seem to have all but broken his spirit. He has no energy, he has a constant severe headache as well as other pains inflicted by the torture. Images and memories are constantly with him that he finds degrading, disturbing and shameful. If I am to really understand him I must allow my own feelings in response to him to emerge. These are not necessarily feelings I would like to have. I find in myself a desire to escape the room myself. I feel sleepy and look at the clock. Still half an hour to go. Then I am overcome by a feeling of sadness and despair into which I momentarily sink. I then come back to myself and feel helpless. How can I help such a wounded man? I think: he is wounded in his body and in his soul. I want to reach out to him. I try to put into words what I have felt and how I imagine he must feel.
>
> He explains to me that he was a rich and important person in his community at home. He often helped members of his family with

> money and jobs as well as young people in the wider community whose education he ensured. I try to imagine what it is like for him in this country where his status is very low and where he has lost his ability to concentrate and cannot act from a position of strength. His wife, who would normally defer to him, makes all the decisions. My own thoughts about gender roles seem unimportant in the face of his shame at loosing his power in this way.
>
> Constantly maintaining an inquiring attitude helps to ensure that I am present for him and that my understanding of his experience is constantly addressed and never taken for granted. When I go into the waiting room to collect the client who comes before him I often see him waiting already. However hard it is for him to find the energy and motivation for other activities, he always remembers to come to see me.

The use of dialogue is an important underlying methodology which informs the use of all my approaches to my research. My conversations with most of those with whom I have met in this inquiry, whether they be my supervisor, colleagues, friends or acquaintances have been imbued with a spirit of dialogue. Most people with whom I have engaged have been thoughtful and inquiring in the way they have responded to me. This is even true of people I have not met personally like theorists whose work I have read in books and papers or speakers on the radio. When I have strayed from this then the validity of that aspect of my research is called into question. When I stray from it I am no longer interested in inquiry but in confirming my own assumptions as I start trying to 'prove a point' rather than staying open to fresh possibilities. I try to remain reflective in all my endeavours by cycling back and checking what I have experienced against previously held assumptions.

I also have various settings in which I more formally reflect on my experience. These include the supervision of my work as a therapist (two supervisors and two supervision groups), the white co-operative

inquiry group and the PhD supervision group when they were current, my PhD supervision with Donna Ladkin, a women's group, BCPC staff group meetings, discussions with friends and family and the reflection I undertake when I am engaged in writing this thesis. All these situations invite me to reflect on my inquiry. I will be challenged if I cease to be thoughtful and dialogic.

Validity in action research

Having discussed my methodology, I will look more closely at validity in action research and psychotherapy and in my own methodology within this thesis. For research to be valid, what it tells us will have strength and conviction so that it conveys something that is useful and reliable.

One of the most basic premises of action research is that we cannot stand aside from the field of inquiry (Gustavsen 2001) and comment on it as if we are not part of that field. We are participant in it (Reason and Bradbury 2001:6). This lays the ground for validity in action research. Most matters concerning validity flow from that statement and what follows from it is that:

- All involved in the research are co-researchers (Reason 1994:41) – we cannot observe the behaviour of others and comment on it legitimately. They have to speak for themselves. If any sense is to be made of their experience, they must do that making sense by inquiring into it although this could be done in dialogue with others. *It is not valid therefore to make a claim based on someone else's experience unless they concur with it.*
- Valid action research is about being in the 'real' world in a 'real' way and then reflecting on our experience so that we can understand it and potentially change. This leads to further action and reflection. *Valid action research must include cycles of action and reflection. In doing so we make a difference in the world.*
- We are actors within the field of inquiry, not just minds. Our inquiry needs to include action in its widest sense. It needs to include our

> thoughts, feelings and reflections on what we *do. Action research that does not at least attempt to make a difference in the world and deal with 'matters of emergence and enduring consequence' (Reason and Bradbury 2001:12) is not valid.*

In order to inquire it follows that a question must be asked. An assertion made without an inquiry and therefore a question is not valid research. In fact, in my view, a piece of research is not valid if it does not ask at least 2 questions so that the initial question leads to at least one more arising from a transformational moment in the inquiry. I show an example of this above when I explore a 'moment' in the White Co-operative Inquiry group. Tentative 'answers' may be arrived at but it is important to arrive at a new place through the inquiry where a new question can be asked to carry the inquiry forward. In order to set out from one question and arrive at another and make a claim, however tentative, we need to go through at least two cycles of action and reflection. For this reason when my inquiry has led me to a new question I have followed it up with a further inquiry. For instance, when a respondent to my questionnaire used the term 'negro' I followed it up by further dialogue, both with her and with a black colleague. In this instance it led me to a better understanding of why the term 'negro' was used in the first place *and* why it is offensive.

Validity of action research in the area of psychotherapy

As this action research thesis is carried out in the context of my professional work as a psychotherapist, I need to ensure that my practice is also valid in an action research context. As I have already pointed out, psychotherapy as I practice it is similar to action research in various regards. It is an inquiry within a relational setting and goes through cycles of action and reflection. We experience something, reflect upon it and see if something different happens. Whatever happens is then reflected upon. Just as in action research, some of the 'action' takes place in the here-and-now relating of those

concerned and some is 'out there' in the world. Furthermore the different 'ways of knowing' (Reason and Bradbury 2001:9), *experiential*, *presentational, propositional* and *practical*, are engaged with in psychotherapy. It is *experiential* in that there is a 'direct face-to-face encounter'; *presentational* in that images, art work etc are often used as part of the encounter; *propositional* in that therapist and client will come to an agreement about how things are and *practical* in that change is affected in the outside world and then reflected upon. (Reason and Bradbury 2001:9)

What makes psychotherapist and action researcher different to each other is not, in itself, a question of validity. It is nevertheless tricky to carry out action research in psychotherapy in a way in which action research considers to be valid because the same validity checks cannot be used. This comes down to the difficulty with enlisting a client as a co-researcher. A co-researcher will not only experience the field of inquiry on an equal basis but will share in putting the research over to the wider world. There is no problem in psychotherapy with a client sharing the field of inquiry. What is difficult is expecting a client to engage in putting this over to the academy in a systematic way.

This aspect of validity in psychotherapy is different in that the project goes in to the world is through the clients 'being' in it. I believe that if the therapy has been thoroughly engaged in, it will affect the therapist and change their 'being-in-the-world' too. If the therapy is 'written up', particularly as a project of the therapist to which the client contributes (as they must if it is to be action research), then this 'writing up' becomes an intrusion into the therapy as it is no longer an undertaking in the service of the client who did not approach the therapist with this in mind. However sensitively and carefully it is undertaken, the client's therapy has been hijacked for research purposes. The 'cauldron' of the therapy is breached and the ingredients can run out.

I have in the past, with this research dilemma in mind, discussed with a long standing client the possibility of writing up our work together as she mentioned that she would like to understand the process better. On reflection the client felt that this would change the nature of the therapy and turn it into something else, less useful to herself.

It is interesting to see that psychotherapy and action research are extremely similar in some ways, as I have shown above, but in regard to how it can be written up, are mutually exclusive. Put at its most bald, that which makes one valid makes the other invalid. Valid psychotherapy must involve a difference in role between psychotherapist and client in order that it be in the service of the client. Valid action research must clearly involve all as co-researchers at all stages including putting the research into the public domain.

Maybe the real difference between the two is their *purpose*. The purpose of action research is to understand the world we live in and the purpose of psychotherapy is to provide professional help to people in distress. Along the way both may provide something of the other. The exploration carried out by action research may well help an individual understand and come to terms with something distressing and the reflection that happens in psychotherapy may well help us understand the world better. It is the process that is similar – the intention and the purpose are different.

In the light of these considerations I have embarked upon this study without making claims for my clients. I have tried to concentrate on my own experience rather than theirs. I do mention matters that have been raised by them but only claim what *I* have received from that or felt about it. I have asked my clients for their permission to mention them in my thesis if it involves part of their story and told them that they can see what I have written if they wish. None have asked to see it and all gave their permission. Although this is well recognised ethical practice it is not without complication as it can also be an

intrusion into the therapy. The only other ethical possibility is not to write about clients at all. However, writing about clients and putting this within the professional domain helps the thinking of the profession to develop. It can become part of the professional holding of the therapist through the development of theory and good practice. I make some recommendations below regarding this.

Psychotherapists constantly reflect on their work in supervision as this is part and parcel of their professional practice but they need, in order to have a healthy 'airing' of their work, to discuss it in a wider context than one supervisor or supervision group. It helps them to broaden and deepen their work. In carrying out my research this is what I am engaged in doing. By doing so I am extending the range of my ability to respond to clients. I have found that I do not need to make claims for my clients in order to do this. Other professions are, after all, in a similar position. Teachers reflect on their work without involving their pupils for instance. Some of the issues may be the same here but my impression is that psychotherapy and counselling are in a particularly difficult position if they wanted to include their clients in action research projects because the work is so personally sensitive and often involves feelings of vulnerability.

It also has to be remembered that any 'claim' we make arises from an intersubjective field, one in which both therapist and client participate. We cannot claim to 'know' anything in an absolute way. Anything that seems 'true' to us in the therapy arises in the space between ourselves and our clients, albeit seen through the lens of our own 'organising principles' (Stolorow and Atwood 1992:see chapter 6).

In order not to have to say that psychotherapists should never engage in action research projects, I have drawn up some guidelines for insuring validity in both disciplines. They are:

- Claims cannot be made for clients by their psychotherapists but can be made about the psychotherapist's own experience if they are tentative and acknowledge the intersubjective context in which it has arisen.
- Claims can be made by supervisors about their own experience with the same proviso.
- Client's stories can be mentioned if claims are only made for the psychotherapist/researcher's response to these stories or if the client's experience is tentatively wondered about. The client's permission should be sought and their identity effectively disguised.
- Cycles of action and reflection should be described on the part of the psychotherapist and may include that of collaborating supervisors and colleagues.

Within this thesis I have used these guidelines to help me ensure that my thesis is valid and follows ethical principles from the point of view of psychotherapy and action research.

Conclusion

I have been aware in writing this chapter how hard it is to use Bateson's 'analytic scissors' in a meaningful way. What I study is hard to separate from the way that I study it. This approach involves a rigorous espousal of unfamiliar non-dualistic epistemology and ontology and discovering methodologies which are reflected on with clarity and integrity and are valid as research.

I have therefore looked for methods that ensure systematic and rigorous self-reflective inquiry, methods that are valid for action research. Several of these involve work with others to help me extend my thinking beyond 'the circles of my own mind' (Scott 2004). The methods that involve others are both first and second person inquiry processes. Second person inquiry processes emerge where others

have clearly joined me as co-researchers. My use of questionnaires, which involve asking others to assist me with my own first person inquiry, I have called an 'extended first person inquiry' process. I have also engaged in third person research in the larger world where the general culture can be more directly influenced.

Particularly because my research concerns myself as a white person, I have been careful to find methods which are based on epistemologies that take, or can take, the hegemonic dominance of the white, western world into account. This may sometimes mean that I have to ensure that I take this into account myself rather than that it is necessarily inherent in the methods themselves. Not all who use dialogue, for instance, are sensitive to power difference when employing it as a method. In so far that power differences of some sort are always present, I have shown that it is necessary at all times to be very clear about these differences when they are present, particularly if you are the one who is in the more powerful position.

This is also true for how psychotherapists work since power within the therapeutic relationship is largely ignored, particularly cultural power differences. When working across difference in culture it is particularly important to be aware of this factor. I have shown how psychotherapy and action research are very similar in various ways, particularly in their need for this sort of sensitivity. But they are incompatible in the domain of collaborating with clients to write up their work together as a research project.

All these factors are explored further within the research I have undertaken. In the next section this inquiry is mostly about my personal learning as a white western woman and the following section is about how this learning applies to my work as a psychotherapist both with my clients and in the profession.

PART TWO

AN EXPLORATION OF BEING WHITE

CHAPTER THREE

Being White

You can't remake the world
Without remaking yourself
Each new era begins within.
It is an inward event,
With unsuspected possibilities
For inner liberation.
From *Mental Fight* by Ben Okri

Introduction

This chapter marks the start of my inquiry into whiteness. I begin with the meaning of whiteness to me and use my own reflections and experiences both from memory and from contemporary diaries in this exploration. Part of this involves present day thoughts and part an exploration of the history of my interest in this area. I am also informed by my reading, primarily in the area of White Studies, but also in Post Colonial Theory.

Some of this exploration was undertaken in a co-operative inquiry group and this is written about in the next chapter. My subsequent exploration of the literature in White Studies and Post Colonial Theory lead me to an exploration of the apparent 'neutrality' of whiteness. This attitude is evidently present among white psychotherapists and I explore the very small body of literature on this subject written by counsellors and psychotherapists. The detail of my work as a white psychotherapist is to be found in Chapter 6. I finish with an account of the development of my own consciousness of whiteness using Helms' *White Racial Identity Ego Statuses* (Helms 1995:185).

When I first embarked upon this inquiry my focus was on cultural difference and, although I understood that I needed to explore my own situation, my focus was on how I related to others of different cultures. I was encouraged by my PhD supervision group to give more emphasis to

myself as situated within a culture. When I started this inquiry I had already written one paper called *A Step Towards Understanding Culture in Relation to Psychotherapy* (Ryde 1997). Maybe the title reveals that I knew at some level that this was just a first step on a journey. In it I show an understanding of the importance of situating yourself within your own culture thus:

> 'There is an inevitable tendency to view the world from our own cultural stand point and it is easy not to appreciate that others see the world from an altogether different perspective. Although this is a familiar idea to psychotherapists and counsellors when considering individual differences, when they come across cultural difference they have an unfortunate tendency to understand this difference in terms of psychopathology.'

And also:

> 'Respecting the cultural integrity of our clients, acknowledging the legitimacy of their culture's way of understanding and being in the world, is of first importance when working across cultures. This will involve an acknowledgement of our own cultural background and how it might blind us to that of others, whether our clients come from vastly different cultures or more similar ones that are nearer to home. As psychotherapists who work within the majority culture which at present dominates internationally, we need to be sensitive to the way we will subtly intrude this culture on others whose own cultural backgrounds have as much validity as our own.'

We can see from these examples that I did understand the importance of owning one's own cultural base, but the main thrust of my argument was to try to understand how to work with others and challenge prevailing views within the profession. I had not thoroughly immersed myself in the exploration of my own whiteness.

This chapter begins with my exploration of what it means to me to be a part of the white, dominant culture. This has not been an easy undertaking. As I will show, whiteness is so around and within me that it

is hard to stand back from it enough to 'see' it and reflect upon it. When I do it brings up feelings of guilt and shame which are not easy to 'stay with'. My attempt is bound to be imperfect and partial but is now an on-going project and does not end with the writing up of my inquiry.

Englishness or Whiteness

As I showed in the introduction to this thesis, my first attempt at a piece of writing which just concentrated on this theme was a piece I called 'Englishness'. Although this was interesting to write, I found that the important issues connected to white privilege were more about being born into the privilege of the white, western world. Although particular wrongs were and are committed specifically by English people in the colonising process, much of the privileges I receive in today's world are connected with being 'white'. I would be afforded the same privileges if I were from any European country or part of the global European diaspora.

In spite of the European diaspora being scattered throughout the globe, It seems to be custom and practice to refer to the parts of the world which are predominently inhabited by white people as 'western' or 'the west'. Bonnett (Bonnett 2000:18) has shown that Europeans have appropriated the use of the word 'white' to describe and 'racialise' themselves (see below) so the white people now found world wide are the result of the European diaspora that occurred through colonisation. Although many white people live in North America and Europe which are towards the west of the globe as it is commonly drawn on a flat page, this does not geographically describe this entire group. More recently it has become recognised that northern nations are richer than southern which also does not hold true in all cases. Whilst acknowledging that the use of the word 'western' does not honour the injustice in the north/south divide, I will follow custom by using the term 'western' throughout.

Although a cursory glance at this subject suggests that 'white' people are those who have 'white' skin, there are many people who have, roughly,

the same colour skins as Europeans who are not counted in this group. (The colour of European's skins can also be of various shades) This includes people such as those from the 'Middle East' and 'Far East', Roma people, South Americans, native Americans etc. It has also included the Irish in America in the past (Bonnett 2000:35). Whether these people are ascribed a 'colour' by white people seems a more confused area. Those from the far East have been called 'yellow' and Native Americans 'red'. People with skin that is clearly more brown than Europeans' such as Asian and Africans sometimes assert that they are 'black' in order to make the political point that they are discriminated against by 'white' people (Brah 1992:127). Others whose skin is roughly the same colour as Europeans often do not describe themselves as 'white'. I found an example of this in a book that provides an opportunity for Thai refugees to tell their stories. It include one who talks about 'white' people behaving in a discriminatory fashion towards him (Refugee Action 2003).

Having decided to concentrate more on my being 'white' and 'western' than being English, I found that some of how I felt about being English, including a pervasive sense of 'nothingness' about it, applied even more when I thought about being 'white'. Although it seemed quite possible to write in theory about a 'white' western hegemony I found it almost impossible to 'feel' what being part of that was like. It is clear however that as a white woman I cannot go about the world without being immediately identifiable as a western person because of my whiteness. Two things immediately struck me about this. One, that I felt guilty and two, that it was almost impossible to think about. Whiteness, like being English, seemed a 'nothingness', an absence of a something, the ground from which other things appeared. As I write now I am struck by how much this has changed since I started exploring this subject when I came to CARPP at the University of Bath in 1999.

This made me wonder if 'white' also seems to imply an absence of 'race'. I am aware, for instance that when questions of race are raised in a

professional context, people tend to turn to a black person, if one is present, as if they must be experts on this subject. So I began to think that 'race' is not just a matter of culture and identity, but a politically constructed concept (Gilroy 1992:50; Lago and Thompson 1996:19). As I began to read White Studies literature this began to make more sense to me. I discovered that race has also been called an 'unstable' category in that it is based on assumptions that have been shown to be spurious since it was first used (Donald and Rattansi 1992:1; Appiah 1994:149; Adams 1996:8).

Black people were thought of as closer to animals than white people when they first came to the west (Dalal 2002:201). It was assumed that there were different 'races' and that white people (Adams 1996) were the most intelligent and capable. (Lago and Thompson 1996:18). This came home to me when I was shown a copy of the 'The Kington Gazette and Radnorshire Chronicle' of June in the year 1900 (Appendix 1). In it is printed a poem, *A Song of the White Man*, by Rudyard Kipling. This poem and the editorial comment following it demonstrate the unabashed and chilling racist and imperialist attitudes that were commonplace at the time. The way the 'white man's hate' is relished is also interesting. These attitudes are part of the English cultural heritage and, to me, they feel shameful to be part of. (The use of the term *'white man'* in the poem also betrays the prevailing attitude to gender.)

Since then differences between 'races' have been shown to be insignificant and mostly based on superficial matters such as skin colour. (Acharyya 1992:84; Donald and Rattansi 1992:1) Genetic characteristics of this sort have evidently been handed down the generations, resulting in the various appearances of people in different parts of the world. Cress Welsing interestingly turned the whole notion of white superiority on its head by suggesting that white people were originally born to black African parents but had genetic deficiencies. She suggests that they were rejected by their black parents and found their way to Europe (Cress Welsing 1991:4).

A Whiter shade of pale

Gradually, as I have started to look at it, whiteness has become more figural for me. Various things have contributed to that: reading various books and articles about whiteness (Frye 1983; McIntosh 1988; Jacobs 1995; Kincheloe, Steinberg et al. 1998; Brandyberry 1999; Kasl 2002; Tuckwell 2002), forming a co-operative inquiry group to explore whiteness and talking about whiteness with others. In discussion with colleagues about launching a conference on the theme of War, Terrorism, Cultural Inequality and Psychotherapy we decided to invite a panel of psychotherapists from different cultural groups. I found it impossible to consider this panel without including a 'white' perspective, much to the puzzlement of my colleagues who thought 'other' points of view more enlightening. I think it is unlikely that I would have had this attitude before embarking on this research. It is as if, through staring at a blank page, I have begun to notice contours and shades that were not at first apparent.

So what have I seen? I have noticed that I am advantaged by being white in many subtle ways. This was brought home to me by McIntosh (1988 also see appendix 2) who found 46 ways in which she benefited by being white in all spheres of everyday life in a paper she wrote 15 years ago, most of which still hold true. I take for granted that I have a rightful place where I live and work and where my children went to school. Like McIntosh, I take for granted a privileged standard of living that includes electricity and electrical goods; motor transport; plentiful and tasty food with much variety; a range of entertainment, both at home on TV and in the community; a criminal justice system that does not discriminate against me including a friendly and polite police force and an educational system which is embedded in my culture. (I am aware that some of these privileges involve class and age as important factors. They may not be afforded me if I were young and working class.) I am writing this on the day that the war started in Iraq. I know that the largest armies in the world act on behalf of what they see as my interests. My

material wealth is gigantic compared to most people in the world. Once I have *really* understood this I am bound to feel guilty.

One of the first things of which I became aware when contemplating my whiteness was my guilt at being white. This led to much discussion in my white co-operative inquiry group and, because of its central importance, I have devoted a chapter to the subject (see chapter 5).

White studies

At the start of my quest I was not aware of a body of knowledge about whiteness as a racial identity. I have since discovered that during the last three decades the discipline of White Studies has grown up in America but is little found in the UK. Alastair Bonnett (Bonnett 2000), who traces the way that white identity was formed historically, considers the area of 'white studies' to be an analysis of whiteness from a North American standpoint. He shows how whiteness has been used in several societies – particularly in the middle east and China - to denote purity and nobility (Bonnett 2000). However, in the process of colonialisation, Europeans asserted that they had white skin in contrast to those in the colonised countries (Bonnett 2000). He asserts that 'white identities are, if nothing else, global phenomena, with global impacts' and that no part of the globe has avoided the impact of this. He describes the way the concept of whiteness is used by Europeans thus:

> 'Modern European white identity is historically unique. People in other societies may be seen to have valued whiteness and to have employed the concept to define, at least in part, who and what they were. But they did not treat being white as a natural category nor did they invest so much of their sense of identity within it. Europeans racialised, which is to say naturalised, the concept of whiteness, and entrusted it with the essence of their community. Europeans turned whiteness into a fetish object, a talisman of the natural whose power appeared to enable them to impose their will on the world.' P21

Bonnett shows that, in identifying themselves as a white and 'purer' race, others were identified as 'black' and inferior (Bonnett 2000). This idea, though now understood to be racist by all but a few extreme right wing groups, does not disappear so easily. Although thirty years ago the Kerner commission (Themstom 1998) identified racism as a 'white problem', The Centre for the Study of White American Culture carried out a survey in which it found that only 7% of that which is written about race in the last thirty years focussed on white people. It seems that white people find it hard to think about themselves as having a 'race' thus making it seem as if 'race' is the problem of those who do 'have' one – the 'ethnic' minorities. Certainly those who are not white feel the effects of racism enough to want to theorise about it as well as act politically in other ways. Of course, theorising about a societal issue *is* a political act as it focuses attention on the issue and legitimates a call for changes.

The 'neutrality' of whiteness as shown by White Studies Theorists

The issue of the apparent 'neutrality' of whiteness, an idea that whiteness is 'just normal' (Dyer 1997; Frankenberg 1999), is a central theme for White Studies theorists and seems to be central to the experience of whiteness, as I show below. This apparent neutrality was something I have found in myself and it was much commented on in my white co-operative inquiry group (see the next chapter). This blindness to whiteness seems to be the cause of much of the phenomenon of white privilege or at least extremely influential in maintaining this privilege. It is both the source of the problem and, in that it sets up a blindness to the moral and ethical situation, it sets in train ways of maintaining that privilege as I will show below.

The idea that whiteness is the normality from which others deviate is such an insidious and subtle idea that it may well be the biggest single factor that keeps white privilege in place. I have taken some examples from various White Studies texts to illustrate this and followed them with my own comments:

'Whites alone can opt out of their own racial identity, can proclaim themselves non-raced.' (Kincheloe and Steinberg 1998)

When whites are together then race is very rarely mentioned except in discussing other racial groups. It seems to be irrelevant. It is interesting to consider if this is a recent phenomenon. The poem 'A Song the White Man' (appendix 1) clearly does refer to the 'white race' which is very rarely named in this way in the last few decades. Up until the early days of the 20th Century white people were not shy about declaring their 'race' superior to other 'races' (Dalal 2002:12). More recently, since white people have apparently accepted the iniquity of this stance, they have, maybe defensively, withdrawn to the 'neutral' position of the 'un-raced'. In the eyes of the 'neutral' white it can seem that non-whites are shadow boxing when they accuse whites of racism or can be accused of having a 'chip on their shoulder'.

'But the idea of whiteness as neutrality, as that which is not there, is ideally suited for designating that social group that is to be taken as the 'human ordinary'.' (Apple 1998)

As an example of this, I heard a discussion on the radio four programme 'Start the Week' about whether or not it was important to try to save beautiful artefacts that had been made in the past but were endangered by war or natural disaster. Adam Philips, a white psychotherapist, was present but did not speak until the end of this discussion. He then remarked that a certain consensus seemed to have been taken for granted in the discussion and pointed out that for many people these objects might be offensive or irrelevant, adding that in a truly pluralistic society such assumptions could not be made. There was a stunned, long silence following this remark after which the chairperson gave a nervous laugh and suggested moving on to the next subject. It seemed to me that these highly intelligent people had no way of responding to a suggestion that another perspective was possible.

'There is no more powerful position than that of being "just" human' (Dyer 1997:2)

No doubt the people who took part in the radio four programme, above, were people who considered themselves to be 'just' human. They were stunned because they could not see outside their 'normative cultural practices' (Frankenberg 1999:228)

'An unmarked marker of others' (Frankenberg 1999:16)

White people, from their neutral position, can designate or 'mark' others. What a powerful position to be in: to be the one that describes 'reality'. All future discourse is carried out in the light of this marking. It is very striking to me that almost every author I have come across in this field has remarked on the way that whiteness seems to be a neutral category and that it is in this way that white privilege is so successfully maintained. White people 'name' or 'mark' others. The identities and boundaries of racial groups are decided upon by white people

'A predominant construction in American literature is undoubtedly whiteness as 'unraced' or racially neutral.' (Aanerud 1997)

In her chapter Fictions of Whiteness: Speaking the Names of Whiteness in US Literature, Rebecca Aarerud foregrounds whiteness by exploring how the whiteness of characters in American literature is used to evoke certain characteristics such as purity and vulnerability in women and strength and rationality in men. If a white person is the protagonist of a book, the fact of their being racially white is rarely remarked upon. This is hardly ever true of anyone who is not white. However the whiteness of their skin is sometimes mentioned without reference to race, particularly in women, to mark these characteristics. (Aanerud p36)

The apparent 'neutrality' of white people is so little grasped by them that there can be a sense of outrage if this position is challenged by non-

whites. For instance, attempts, often through equal opportunities policies, to encourage non-whites into areas of life that have in the past been closed to them often result in white people feeling themselves to be an 'endangered minority' and that 'white culture' must be preserved. I certainly came across this view myself when I was in South Africa.

This calls into question whether it is possible to talk about 'white culture' or, indeed, 'black culture'. In fact 'culture', usually defined as the underlying values, norms and assumptions held in groups, is a complex and fluid phenomenon and it is clearly erroneous to think of there being a 'white' culture or a 'black' culture as both catagories have much diversity within them. Frankenberger (1999:19) is very critical of using the word 'culture' in relation to 'whiteness'. She points out that this idea 'evades and mystifies the positioning of whiteness in the racial hierarchy' and that 'such constructions reify and homogenize whiteness'. In other words the idea of a white culture encourages a collusion with the idea that there is something 'real' about whiteness even if a biological basis for it is not accepted. It suggests that being white is just another racial category rather than a construction that has been used to assert privilege for those with white skins. Whilst I understand these objections I also think that white people do impose an insidious culture on others which is regarded by whites as self evidently 'good'. It includes the imposition of political systems, types of food, consumer goods, attitudes to the family and child rearing etc. There are many cultural manifestations among 'white' people but they do also represent a larger cultural consensus. Along with asserting privilege and dominance there is a pervasive homogenising of the world that is promulgated by white westerners which can be understood as a sort of pervasive cultural as well as racial colonisation.

Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial theory is another important arena in which this theorising takes place. This is mostly engaged in by those who are not white, unlike White Studies, and provides an analysis of colonialisation. It is of

interest, therefore, to my study but not as central as White Studies as I am writing from a white perspective.

The term colonialisation as used by postcolonial theorists does not have a simple definition but tends to include an analysis of past colonialisation by European countries as well as a complex critique of the present situation that former colonies find themselves in. Bhabha says

> 'the term postcolonial is increasingly used to describe that form of social criticism that bears witness to those unequal and uneven processes of presentation by which the historical experience of the once-colonised Third World comes to be framed in the West' (Mongia 1997:1).

One of the most important analyses of postcolonial theory is similar to that of Bonnett (above) which is that the 'west' not only colonised the world but framed its identity by a process of naming. Not only was the map of the world drawn by white people but the descriptions and namings of peoples, 'races' and nationalities were carried out by them. Their identities have been 'colonised' in a process that still exists for them today. It is hard to find other descriptions that are not either compliant with western ones or that are not made in reaction to it.

As most writers of postcolonial theory are not 'white' people, they tend to speak from the position of having suffered colonialism themselves. This tends to make the perspective of the two disciplines rather different although there is some cross fertilisation between the two. Both offer similar analyses of white privilege and hegemony and the extremely distorting effect on people who are not deemed to be white. Postcolonial theorists are more likely to use the term 'western' (Christian 1997:152) or 'Anglo-American' (Mongia 1997:12) than 'white' but their analysis of colonialisation describes important ways in which white studies theorists would say that 'white' people have 'performed' their whiteness on 'black' people (Frankenberg 1999:3).

It seems to me that one of the ways that whiteness is 'performed' on 'black' people is by actually giving them psychotherapy (Gilbert 2005). Psychotherapy theorising has been carried out in a white, western context largely without that context being acknowledged as I show below.

Whiteness and the psychotherapist

Having explored the meaning of whiteness in a general way I will now explore what this means to me as a psychotherapist and turn first to an exploration of the literature on this subject. I have found only three pieces written specifically by counsellors or psychotherapists on the subject of being a white counsellor or psychotherapist. One is a paper by Lynne Jacobs (2000) *For Whites Only*. Another is the book mentioned above by Gill Tuckwell *Racial Identity: White Counsellors and Therapists* (2002). The third is by Colin Lago (2005) called *Upon Being a White Therapist: Have you Noticed?* I will explore the first two of these in some depth and also, in this context, some of the work of Dalal (2002) as, in his book *Race, Colour and Processes of Racialisation*, he deconstructs the word 'race' and challenges its existence as a concept. In the course of this he explores the meanings of the word 'white' as well as the word 'black'. These books and papers have been very useful in helping me, not only to think about whiteness *per se*, but also about whiteness within the field of psychotherapy. I will start with Jacobs' paper.

Jacobs

Lynne Jacobs is an American dialogic Gestalt therapist who has also trained as an intersubjective psychoanalyst at the Institute for Contemporary Psychoanalysis in California. She describes her paper as a 'stream of consciousness' and that 'a graceful paper would be a lie' (Jacobs 2000:10) though it seems to me to be much more coherent than this implies. Maybe her feeling about the roughness of her paper says more about the disturbed feelings that she is aware of when she writes. I can certainly identify with this. In fact I found her paper passionate but very well thought-through and expressed. She says she wrote this piece

in the hope of healing both the racial divide and herself. (p1). She encourages white therapists to be cognizant of their dominant status and see that 'unfortunately deeply embedded 'whites only' constructs of thought and ideology.....permeate our culture, largely outside of ordinary everyday awareness.' She looks at why she is passionate about the issue as she says she is often asked to justify it. Her parents were against the 'colour bar', 'and yet being asked to explore where [her] interest comes from seems to [her] to be a way of participating in the very racial insensitivity [she is] attempting to overcome'. (p1). And yet 'the more intriguing question for [her] is why so few whites are even aware of and distressed by, the extremity of the racial divide in the US.' She asks:

> 'how is it that an interest in one of the most cancerous problems of American culture is viewed as unusual and in need of explanation when a white person expresses interest and yet is viewed as self-evident – if overwrought, from the perspective of many whites – when expressed by a person of color?' (p1)

Much of this is of interest to me as it addresses some of the questions I began with. I came from a similar background, with politicised parents who were 'against the colour bar' but who had their own blind spots to their prejudice. Her question about why she should have to explain an interest in her 'race' perpetuating such a 'cancerous problem' also reminds me of the hostility that has been shown to me for attempting to explore this subject as it is thought to be more rightfully the province of black people. Whilst I acknowledge that the challenge to focus more on myself is the most fruitful way of proceeding (also acknowledged by Jacobs), I feel a little encouraged by her question. I hear an encouragement and a support in her assertion that this inquiry is important for me as a white person to pursue. She quotes McConville as saying 'any system of privilege not only oppresses the disenfranchised, but poisons the spirit and diminishes the humanity of those who are advantaged' (McConville 1997).

Jacobs also comes to similar conclusions to myself about a way forward in terms of working across difference in culture in psychotherapy. She regards 'self reflectiveness and openness to correction by the patient [to be] the best safeguards against ignorant abuse of our power as therapists'. Jacobs feels that she must always initiate race-based discussions with a client as she recognises that clients may well feel that a white therapist may not see the necessity for this. Interestingly she also chides herself for wanting to seem different to 'those other whites' (p7). I also recognise this in myself as a shadow side of 'trying to get it right' as a white therapist. This same dynamic was noticed in my white co-operative inquiry group (see chapter 4) and also in a similar group set up by European-American, Cooperative Challenging Whiteness (2004) who comment on the irony of wanting to be better than a group you are critical of because they think of themselves as superior! As Jacobs shows, this attitude can encourage a client to leave their feelings about white people outside the room for fear of hurting the 'nice' therapist.

Maybe one of the most important aspects to acknowledge in working across cultures as a white person is the power within the therapy room – how it is understood and how it is distributed. (Lago and Thompson 1996:46 - 52, see also chapter 7). Jacobs asserts that when we are 'willing to be changed by close engagement' the power balance changes. Then experiences and perceptions are welcomed not just tolerated (p16). Much of the problem here concerns the difficulty of not 'meeting' as therapist and client as the two cultural worlds are not so much in danger of being incompatible, as being unrecognised and denied. Jacobs suggests that a paradoxical notion of 'meeting-by-seeing-where-we-cannot-meet' (p13) as one way through. It is often found in psychotherapy practice that paradoxically, when immersed in this work and really feeling the difficulties, greater ease with the situation is discovered (p17).

I am particularly interested in her comments about how the therapeutic relationship can develop when issues of power and culture have been well identified and acknowledged. She says: 'when race issues have been well attended to we can be 'busy with another way of relating' and she is 'keenly sensitive to the times when [her] patients want a chance to just talk as if we can know each other very well, way under the skin where those categorical differences do not live'. At those times the therapeutic atmosphere is a 'play space' (Winnicott 1971). 'The therapeutic process involves continual co-construction and deconstruction of various meanings, including the meanings revolving around racial identity.' Having shown how we might, at least for a time, transcend cultural difference she also warns that it is important to 'keep in mind the different worlds we enter when the session ends.' (p15).

Jacobs pushes her thinking further to encompass her work with white clients from this point of view and says that 'racial thinking is rarely figural when [she is] working with a white client.' (p17). She does not draw any conclusions from this but it is interesting to consider this reluctance to consider talking about being white. My fantasy is that, if one brought it up, most clients would think one was on a politically correct hobbyhorse. In my own practice with white people I can think of a few times when racism or feelings about black people were raised and worked with but not specifically feelings about being white and that we are both white people. As I write and contemplate so doing I feel awkward and embarrassed as if I would infringe a social code of conduct that could show me up as naïve or on a wrong headed campaign.

In summary, Jacobs encourages white people, and, in particular white therapists, to have a thorough knowledge of their own whiteness and cultural privilege as a basis from which to meet others whatever their 'colour' or 'culture'. She is not politically neutral but passionately wishes to find ways of addressing this 'cancerous' problem.

Tuckwell

Gill Tuckwell is a British counsellor, supervisor and trainer. I find in turning to her book, *Racial Identity, White Counsellors and Therapists*, that it is much less personal than Jacob's paper but it does bring up very important issues for understanding the consciousness of 'white' people in a racial context as well as looking at issues that are pertinent for white therapists. Tuckwell explores both biological and social theories about race, a subject that has been tackled in several other books (Sue and Sue 1990; Lago and Thompson 1996). What makes this book different is her emphasis on white as well as black experience. For instance she says:

> From a socio-political perspective, race has been seen as a signifier of relative power and status in society. This in turn has left a legacy of social experiences and memories for black populations and white populations collectively. These experiences have had a profound cumulative effect on the intrapsychic world of black people and white people. From their respective positions across the social divide, each group has developed beliefs, attitudes and feelings about self and other, and these operate at both a conscious and unconscious level. The interaction between socio-political events and psychological development is thus highly significant in understanding the meaning of race (P19).

Tuckwell goes on to explore the meaning of race in the individual's inner world and recognises here the way in which whiteness becomes invisible in a racial environment mentioned above. She says:

> 'The dominant group seldom needs to speak its name: it is defined in contrast to the more explicit naming of marginal and subordinated subjects.'

and goes on to say:

> 'Historically the silence about white representation and white identity was part of the internalised assumption that white values, customs, traditions and characteristics were the exclusive standards against which other peoples and world orders must be evaluated and perceived.'

This accords with my own experience and reading, both of my own attitudes and those of people I have spoken to. She quotes Dyer (1997) as very powerfully suggesting that white people, by their silence, take up a position of authority, claiming to speak for the human race rather than only for white groups. He says 'there is no more powerful position than that of being 'just' human. The claim to power is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity.' (Dyer 1997:2)

Tuckwell has an interesting list of ways in which people tend to be resistant to acknowledging their whiteness in training events that she has run. These are:

- Focusing on experiences of gender or culture rather than race;
- Focusing intellectually on structural issues such as racism;
- Challenging the concept of 'race' at an intellectual level
- Referring to relationships with neighbours or friends who are black
- Wishing to 'protect' black people from hurt
- Wishing to identify with black people in the group.

She considers these to have the effect of 'shifting the focus away from the vulnerability of looking at self and the experiences of whiteness.' What strikes me about this list is that I can identify with all of them! No doubt the less I use these defences myself the more able I will be to encourage others not to do so in training events and structure these events in ways which will challenge these resistances. Even in a recent training event in South Africa I can see that some of these were employed by myself and the group.

In a later chapter on Race and White Identity, Tuckwell explores the complex interaction between inner and outer-world development including the insidious and all encompassing effect of the way white

groups ignore whiteness. She shows how racial identity is an evolving process (p 76), much of which is unconscious and transmitted to children as they grow up and identify with family and those around them. However it is also a 'lifelong activity' as each individual interprets the messages received about race, and modifies these in the light of their own experience. She says the 'process of racial identification centres initially on superficial characteristics such as skin colour, which takes on a symbolic meaning in which certain belief systems and feelings about race are internalised'.

Tuckwell also explores the meanings that 'whiteness' has taken on, much of which come to us very powerfully from the Bible. Meanings of purity, forgiveness and redemption are examples. She also points out that the Islamic tradition also associates blackness with sin and whiteness with purity (p80).

In summary, Tuckwell shows how white people tend to see themselves as culturally and racially neutral and that this also applies to white therapists, including students and trainers. She explores in detail how attitudes to race and culture, both in oneself and towards others, are developed in complex ways, through inner and outer pressures and influences.

Lago

Colin Lago (Lago 2005) has written and lectured in the area of intercultural therapy for many years but has recently turned his attention to whiteness. His paper *Upon Being a White Therapist: Have you Noticed?* is something of a wake-up call to therapists and reviews the area of white studies to show white therapists how they take their whiteness for granted as a 'neutral' category. He comments that he recently offered a workshop on this subject and that this had a very low take up. As he is a well-known speaker and would usually have no difficulty in filling a workshop I thought this was very interesting and accords with my own experience. In attempting to find interest in my

'white' co-operative inquiry group, for example, and other workshops on this subject that I have offered. It is also interesting that he has been experiencing difficulty in finding a publisher for this paper.

Dalal

Farhad Dalal is a British group analyst of Indian origin. I have included an exploration of his work at this point as he explores the issue of the meaning of whiteness in much more depth. With the help of Cruden's Complete Concordance (Cruden 1769), he looked at every usage of the words 'white' and 'black' in the authorised version of the Holy Bible (Dalal 2002:142 and 143). He has much to say about the word 'black' as well but I am confining meanings here to the word 'white'. These mostly concerned goodness and, in particular, purity, though there were two mentions of white as a cover up as in a 'whitewash'. (It occurs to me that a 'whitewash' implies that something is made to *seem* good even though it isn't.) He is very struck by the consistency of the symbolic meanings of the word 'white' which is seen as symbolising not people, but 'good'.

Dalal analyses the way that the word 'white' has evolved to have the symbolic meanings it has today with the help of the work of the sociologist Norbert Elias. Elias' book *The Civilising Process* (Elias 1994) is a compilation of two other books (*The History of Manners and State Formation* and *Civilisation* written in 1939 and translated into English in 1978 and 1982 respectively) and is a history of the way in which western culture was made. He shows that during this process, the symbolism of 'whiteness' with its implication of goodness and purity was identified with 'white' people so that others not identified in this way could be cast out and identified with what is sullied, evil and sinful.

As described in chapter 4, my cooperative inquiry group asked about 5 people to give associations to the word 'white' without telling them why the question was asked. On considering the responses, we saw that many associations had a neutral or even negative meaning. I had an

opportunity to ask Dalal what he thought of this. He felt quite sure that it showed resistance to owning to racism on the part of those who responded to our question as he thought most people's first association with the word white was to that of white skin and therefore race. Of course the truth of this is impossible to ascertain but it is interesting nevertheless. This assertion was rejected by the cooperative inquiry group who thought that their respondents had not had white skin in mind, even unconsciously. We hypothesised that, with a change in the general culture and the reduction in the importance of the Bible in the education of children, the word 'white' no longer has so consistently a symbolic meaning of 'good' and 'pure' (see chapter 4).

Nevertheless, in summary, his work has helped me to see that, although 'whiteness' seems so completely unremarkable that it is not even noticed by myself and other white people, it is reinforced by cultural messages about goodness and purity.

The development of my own consciousness of my racial identity

Before finishing this chapter I will explore further the development of my own consciousness of a white identity by using the Helms' *White Racial Identity Ego Statuses* (Helms 1995:185). This scale was developed by the counseling psychologist, J. E. Helms, following her *People of Colour Racial Identity Ego Statuses* which was designed to help people to counteract internalised racism - in other words it encourages in black people an identity which is not dependent on the approval of white society. The *White Racial Identity Ego Statuses* is the white counterpart which shows a progression in five stages from a lack of awareness of oneself as participating within a racial environment to full awareness as follows:

Contact status:

Satisfaction with racial status quo, obliviousness to racism and one's participation in it. If racial factors influence life decision they do so in a simplistic fashion.

Disintegration status:

disorientation and anxiety provoked by unresolvable racial moral dilemmas that force one to choose between own-group loyalty and humanism. May be stymied by life situations that arouse racial dilemmas

Reintegration status:

Idealization of one's socioracial group. Denigration and intolerance for other group. Racial factors may strongly influence life decisions

Pseudoindependence status:

Intellectualised commitment to one's own socioracial group and deceptive tolerance of other groups. May make life decision to 'help' other racial groups.

Immersion/Emersion:

Search for an understanding of the personal meaning of racism and ways in which one benefits and redefinition of whiteness. Life choices may incorporate racial activism

Autonomy status:

Informed positive socioracial-group commitment, use of internal standards for self definition, capacity to relinquish the privileges of racism. May avoid life options that require participation in racial oppression.

(Helms 1995:185)

My analysis of my own consciousness is as follows:

Contact Status. Fairly early in life I was made aware of racism by my father and told that it was 'wrong'. I think this was pretty well simultaneous with my being aware of race as an issue. Having said that, it was not something that worried me very much as a young child, particularly as I did not know any black people personally. Very few, if any, lived in my immediate vicinity. When I was 12 a Nigerian girl came to my school and became a close friend. I was aware of the complexity and painfulness of the issues by then, but thought of 'race' as a problem specifically for 'black' people.

Disintegration Status. In my teens and early twenties I was aware of painful racial dilemmas. I was one of only three girls not chosen as a prefect in the school. One was my Nigerian friend and the other was very fat. Both were extremely clever and I knew that they were on the receiving end of prejudice of one sort or another and that this was grossly unfair. I was also aware of feeling that I did not want to be associated with them in this way. (Although I did not see it in this way at the time, my not being made a prefect may have been a class issue. My fees were paid by a Trust and my class status was lower than the other girls and I tended to be awkward and gauche.) Another incident that comes to mind is my rejection of two black men who were potential boyfriends as I did not want to have a sexual relationship with them.

Reintegration Status. I find this one very hard to think about in terms of my own behaviour and consciousness. I think I may be more guilty of sins of omission than commission. I do not see a retrenchment to an earlier phase as described by Helms but I do see many years in which this issue was not much further attended to.

Pseudoindependence status. I can indentify with this status more clearly. I was motivated as a young adult to 'help' other racial groups, most obviously through joining organisations like Anti-apartheid and Amnesty International. Although I lived in a racially diverse community in my 30s I did not know many black people.

Immersion/Emersion status. I think a seminal moment in coming into this status was deciding to join the Intercultural and Equal Opportunities committee of my national professional association. There I was exposed to debates and dilemmas thrown up by individual and institutional racism. It made me more acutely aware of the racism endemic in my own psychotherapy organisation and resulted in my efforts to challenge this both in myself and the organisation. It also led to my choosing this topic for my PhD.

Autonomy Status. I can see that in many ways I am not in this place. Although my awareness of my white identity has been greatly enhanced recently I struggle to find examples of 'relinquishing the privileges of racism'. Of course many of these cannot be relinquished as they involve how one is seen by others though it is possible to challenge them.

Undertaking the exercise of considering where I am on this scale has provided me with a touchstone to measure my own awareness. I refer to it again in the next chapter where I engage my co-operative inquiry group in using it and reflect on it further in the Conclusion to the thesis.

Conclusion

In writing this chapter I have engaged with questions that arose for me at the beginning and discussed in the Introduction, particularly these:

- Who am I as a white person?
- What is the nature of my privilege as a white person?
- How does being white affect my ability to relate to people who are not white?
- What is the nature of 'race' and who am I in a racialised environment?

I have become clearer about these questions (as I show below) though they are further explored in later chapters before I turn more specifically to questions which relate to how being white affects my work as a psychotherapist.

Through my inquiry so far I have come to see that, in a racialised environment, I, along with other western people, have a 'race' as much as anyone else, whatever their 'colour' or 'ethnic' group. Although race is an 'empty' category it exists in the popular mind – we live in a racialised environment. Having had this realisation the question that arises is 'how do I respond to being complicit in western institutional racism?' This

question seems to me to have two parts: 'can I notice and challenge my own racism?' and 'can I notice and challenge institutional racism in my own culture?'

The first question: 'can I notice and challenge my own racism?' is an ongoing matter. It means being prepared to notice my own behaviour and inner dialogue and listen to the challenges of others. As I explore in Chapter 5, maybe it involves taking notice of feelings of guilt and shame when they occur. To some extent I think I have been able to do this but I can see that it is not something that is ever completed.

In many ways the second question is more challenging as institutional racism is embedded firmly in every nook and cranny of western society. As I write today it is ten years since Steven Laurence was murdered. Imran Kahn, who acted as the family's lawyer at the time, spoke recently on the television to say that, while some progress had been made, particularly in police practices, it seemed to him that institutional racism is still endemic.

Although, as Dalal (2002) says, there is no such thing as 'race', we human beings do form ourselves into groups. We identify with the groups we 'belong' to and project 'badness' on to groups which are outside its boundaries (Hellinger and Hovel 1999). In the course of this, western society (or the European diaspora), with its particular history of undergoing a 'civilising process' in the terms Elias describes, (Elias 1994) has colonised most of the rest of the world in various ways over several centuries. More recently that colonisation has been a cultural one with the use of political and economic pressure. Much of this has been achieved by asserting a superiority of the 'white race'. This sense of superiority is kept in place with the help of the human tendency to project negative qualities on to other groups (Hellinger and Hovel 1999). 'Non-white' groups being thought of as 'black' encourages this projection to include what is considered primitive, dark, mysterious and dangerous (Adams 1996; Dalal 2002). We therefore now live in a 'racialised' (Dalal

2002) environment in which white, western people seem to have 'forgotten' their assertion that they are a 'white race' and now tend to see themselves as being racially neutral (Bonnett 2000). This 'colour coding' of non-whites means that the situation is perpetuated over time and is hard to challenge or rectify.

This chapter has included the work of several authors who have helped me to understand the meaning of 'whiteness' in today's society and has helped me to think about my own whiteness more clearly. The authors of these texts have provided me with a context in which to place my own experience and, particularly the psychotherapy authors, have given me a sense of having 'fellow travelers' on the path. The next chapter shows how I joined with colleagues in co-researching our whiteness within a co-operative inquiry group. It has helped me further with the questions I posed above and turns the first question from 'who am I as a white person' to 'who are we as white people'.

CHAPTER FOUR

Co-Operative Inquiry into the Experience of Being White

We can all re-dream the world, our lives.
But the conception must begin now.
The birth must begin now.
We should consecrate ourselves
To prepare ourselves for a new air,
For a fuller future.
The preparation would be rewarding,
For we are each one of us saviours
And co-makers of the world we live in.
But we should begin now, here,
Among one another
And in solitude.
From *Mental Fight* by Ben Okri

Introduction

Having decided to explore the issue of my own racial identity as a white 'western' person through my reading and through self-reflection, I felt that I needed the help of colleagues if I were to challenge my thinking more fully and deepen my inquiry. This chapter shows how a co-operative inquiry was set up for this purpose, including the criteria and processes I used for finding co-researchers. I describe the themes that emerged within the group and explore the impact it has had both on myself and other members of the group.

Setting up the Group

I wanted this co-operative inquiry group to provide a second person aspect (Torbert 2002) to my inquiry and help me to think through the issues. Partly in order to limit and contain the scope of the inquiry and partly to inquire into how being white affects myself and others as professionals, I made a decision to open the membership of the group only to white psychotherapists and counsellors. I chose not to limit the gender of the participants to women as issues of gender are not central to my inquiry. I also decided that, in order to be realistic about the time

availability of both myself and other participants, I needed to limit the geographical spread of the group to the Bath/Bristol area. The notes I wrote at the time are included as Appendix 3.

These notes show how it was difficult for me initially to think about being white without thinking about relating to 'black' people'. No doubt if human beings all had the same colour skin, some other way of finding hierarchical differences would be found. However, within this *racialised* environment, black people *experience* a lack of privilege and are very aware of it whilst white people are often unaware of their privilege, merely taking it for granted. I do not hear black people saying that they cannot think about being black without thinking about white people whereas, in my experience, the obverse of this comment is nearly always made by white people. I explore this more fully below.

Having reflected on setting up the group, written some thoughts about it which I have included as Appendix 3 and discussed in my PhD supervision group, I set about writing an advertisement for the group. I approached psychotherapy organisations in the Bath/Bristol area with this for their newsletters. This notice is included as Appendix 4

Membership and Attendance of Meetings

There was not a huge response to this advertisement. I could guess the reasons for this and it is fairly safe to assume that the question of what it means to be white is not of burning importance to most white people due to their unquestioned identification with the normality of their whiteness.

In the end five people joined the group. Two of the members were graduates of my own psychotherapy training programme, one was from a psychosynthesis programme, and the other was a counsellor who heard of the group through a colleague. There were 7 meetings over 16 months.

Notes, which are included as appendix 5, were written after each group and sent to others on the following day. Names of participants have been fictionalised at their request.

Power and Authority in the Group

I am a fairly well known figure in the psychotherapy world, particularly in the South West area, and I was aware that this might affect authority issues in the group. This was compounded by the likelihood of authority being invested in me because I started the group. I tried to lessen the impact of this by suggesting that we meet in different houses. In the event we only used one other location, as participants were happier with coming to my home. I also felt torn between a sense that I needed to mitigate the impact of setting up the group with the sense that I was responsible for it. I had instigated the group and intended to write about it in my thesis so I felt an obligation to take on some of the tasks such as 'writing the group up'. The group seemed very happy for me to take a lead on such things.

It emerged, though, after the group disbanded, that they would have been happy for me to have taken more authority. The difficulty with power and authority in co-operative inquiry groups is recognised by Ospina et al (2004:66) who say: 'Democratic aspirations behind action research are much harder to achieve in practice than in theory.' However they recognise an interesting distinction when they say 'there is a difference between giving up privilege (a democratic aspiration) and giving up authority (a suppression of one's voice). Ladkin (2004) makes a similar point in showing that the issues are complex and not easily resolved. She suggests that we need to be aware of and include this complexity rather than think we can overcome it.

It was important to me that it was possible to remain dialogic in the group and did not want power and authority issues to get in the way. I wanted our explorations to remain open and inquiring without group

members being forced into fixed or compliant positions on the one hand whilst allowing robust encounter on the other.

Recording the Group

I decided to write an account of the group from memory (and a few notes taken at the time) and send it out to members for any thoughts or emendations. The group, and particularly one member of it, preferred not to have it taped. This means that my record of it is not a verbatim account but is endorsed by group members. I encouraged others to give their accounts, either from scratch, or in response to mine and examples of both of these are given below.

When recording the group I was concerned to ensure that all themes were included and, as far as possible, all the thoughts and reflections of different group members. I also included any interactions between group members that affected or reflected the group process.

The Group Process

When I embarked upon the co-operative inquiry group I had thought that we would engage in experimental activities such as noticing our feelings about black people and then bringing them back to the group. However there was some resistance to proceeding in this way as group members were not keen to receive 'home work'. Most of the actions we took were therefore more focused on ideas brought to the group. The discussion that ensued was not abstract but was based in our own experience. This seemed to be important to us all. When each person spoke at the beginning, they did so in a way which described their own *experience* rather than opinions and this set the tone for future meetings. We wanted the group to touch us personally and for our discussion to be connected to lived experience and not just abstracted thoughts which emanated from a political or social stance. Examples of the kinds of topics discussed included:

- reflections on what in our personal lives drew us to the subject,

- whether and how we felt guilty about being white and
- the meaning that words 'white' and 'black' held for us.

We reflected on any changes we found in further 'action' that we took after the discussion.

My circulation of an account of the group helped to re-focus attention on the issues that arose and helped us to notice how feelings and attitudes changed over time (see below). In this way cycles of action and reflection were undertaken.

The desire on the part of group members for the group to reflect our feeling responses rather than rational opinions reflects the priorities of psychotherapists who tend to hold the value that change grows out of a connectedness to our felt responses rather than rational decision making (Rogers 1942:132).

I consider that the group was almost always dialogic and is an example of the use of dialogue in my research. The quality of listening was usually good as is borne out by members' post-group reflections (see below). Everyone reported that their experiences and opinions were well respected and related to. Sometimes there were misunderstandings but when these were picked up and articulated they were not only heard but we tried to learn the lessons from the misunderstanding. Several examples are given below, the most striking of which is the way in which I 'blanked out' one member's remarks about the universal nature of the meanings of the words 'black' and 'white'. It was important in this and other cases that there was not only a repair to the mishearing but that the meaning of the mishearing was reflected upon. This brings a higher order of reflection as the first level is to hear and correct a misunderstanding and the second is to understand as fully as possible the *meaning* of the misunderstanding

including any resistance to hearing it in the first place. This is explored further below.

As psychotherapists we were aware that the more intimacy there was between group members, the more profound the learning. I tried to foster this kind of atmosphere by being as open as possible myself. I suggested at the beginning that we all tell the group about any impulse or thoughts that had led us to come to the group. The level at which we were able to share intimate information in this first group was significant and set the tone for subsequent meetings. By speaking first I was able to model openness about my past experiences and ways I was perturbed by my present attitudes.

I was keen that we should be able to confront each other and not collude with unexplored assumptions. Modeling this approach was one way I encouraged a culture of openness. I welcomed challenges when I received them myself, such as suspecting that black professionals would not be as good as white ones (see below). I was keen that we found a balance between confronting assumptions and racist attitudes in each other whilst not treading so heavily on sensitive areas that it would be hard not to withdraw. I have found that this balance is found by remaining dialogic. My wish to 'confront assumptions' may be based on my own assumptions so I remain as open as possible to hearing the other point of view whilst also giving my own responses. This ensures that those on both sides of the dialogue feel heard. An example of this occurred on 20th October 2002 (see appendix 5). On this occasion a group member said that he thought it was impossible to talk about being white without thinking about blackness. He thought the group would have been more interesting if black people had been present. Although the group had been formed on my own premise that it was good to think about being white *without* involving black people I stayed open to his idea. He then 'had a go' at talking about being white in an experimental way. This remained an issue for this group member for much of the group and we engaged with it at various times. When the

group ended he reflected on his previous lack of awareness of the impact of being white on black people (see below).

Inquiry Questions

As I initiated the group and had been considering the question of what it is to be white for some time, many of the initial questions were my own (see appendix 3). However as we progressed, questions arose in the group although they were often implied rather than explicit. Having examined the reports of each group, I can see that the questions which arose in the group were:

> Is guilt useful in exploring racism?
> Can we find a way to talk about our racist thoughts?
> Can we talk about whiteness without talking about blackness?
> Is it racist to find black people 'interesting'?
> What meaning does 'white' have?

I will take each question one at a time in order to explore how the group engaged with them.

Is guilt useful in relation to racism?

The subject of whether guilt was neurotic or healthy in relation to racism was much discussed in the group. I will not say much more about it here in a specific way as a whole chapter which includes thoughts and feelings of group members is devoted to the subject (see Chapter 5). However, looking back I think that guilt and shame were important issues in the group process. My notes show that we were more tentative at first when talking about being white than later in the group life, maybe for fear of being thought racist and also for fear of discovering this in ourselves.

It was always possible that we might have shamed each other by our responses to any possible racism discovered in the group. It was vitally important in particular to remaining dialogic when exploring these

feelings and assumptions. By listening well to each other in a respectful way (and thus being dialogic), no-one reported feeling shamed within the group (see below).

Can we find a way to talk about our racist thoughts?
An awareness that we had racist thoughts and that they disturbed us was a strong motivating factor in the group coming together. In looking at my notes of the first meeting (see Appendix 5) I see that:

> Richard said that he was 'aware of having feelings about people of other races and cultures that were disturbing to him.'
>
> Sue said she had been led to do the group by an experience of a conflict with a black colleague at work. She felt that unconscious feelings may have driven this response and had joined the group to explore this.
>
> I gave as an example of my own hidden racism that I was 'frustrated' by a black friend's lack of need for 'help'.

In the first group that Anna attended she said:

> she was aware that one of her prejudiced attitudes was of finding black people 'interesting' in a rather academic, objectifying way.

In the following group we noticed that, although we had personal experiences of competent and clever black people, we carried, usually just out of awareness, a sort of hierarchy of cleverness in relation to race. Exploring in this open way was quite difficult as we were owning to prejudiced thoughts and feelings that we would normally keep to ourselves. As time went on it seems to me that we became more confident to talk in this way as it became clearer that two conflicting fears would not be realised: we were not going to be shamed by describing racist feelings, nor would such explorations lead to a confirmation of racist attitudes. Instead, naming what was real would

lead to an increased ability to 'see' otherness as enriching..

Although I had not consciously become aware of these two fears before the group started, I think on reflection now, that they were influencing me and seemed not to be founded as the group continued. We were able to take attitudes out of the cupboard to look at such as 'is it okay to find black people 'interesting?'. This was founded on an open, dialogic process in which we *responded* rather than *reacted* to other people's thoughts. Although we did not all come to the same conclusion about this it is clear, from my conversations with people after the group, that they found it helpful to explore responses which are normally kept under wraps. Cycles of action (taken outside the group as well as talking about our experiences within it) and reflection (on these experiences) led to further action (opening up awareness which had not been previously known about which led to potential new action in the light of this awareness.)

Can we talk about whiteness without talking about blackness?
I engaged with the quandary of whether we can talk about 'whiteness' without talking about 'blackness' in Chapter 3 where I look at the meaning of the word 'white'. It was also explored in various ways within the group and, as I mentioned above, became a matter of disagreement between us. As the group had been formed to think about whiteness without the presence of black people I was aware that I could be defensive as the whole question could challenge the *raison d'etre* of the group. After several groups in which this was touched on and I struggled with the possibility that I might have led the group into a foolish endeavour, Richard wrote an email which included:

> Personally I'm looking forward to the day when we can admit that being white has no 'meaning' – it's just a physiological quirk resulting from the evolutionary process.

I replied:

> The thing I think is missing from what you said is that we do live by the benefits of being 'white' and on the whole don't do a lot about it. .....You say you feel 'anxiety, disappointment and fear at the human tendency to split and project' but you don't include yourself as culpable in any way for the way 'whites' have done this to 'blacks'.

Having thought hard about Richard's challenge I felt able to say something from the heart which was a challenge to him but I knew from the robustness of the dialogue between us that he could 'take' this kind of challenge. Although Richard thought that it was not possible to think about being white without thinking about being black, he seems to have changed his mind about this (see below) after the group disbanded. Later in the same email Richard also drew a parallel between white people and heterosexuals which I thought was very telling. Heterosexuals are in a similar position to white people as their sexuality often appears to them as the norm rather than somewhere along a spectrum of different sexualities. For me I think there has been a 'drip, drip, drip' effect of talking about whiteness so that it has become more and more natural. Getting used to speaking in this way in the group was a significant factor in this shift.

Is it racist to find black people 'interesting'?

The question of whether it is racist to find black people 'interesting' was one that concerned us. Some thought that showing this interest revealed a natural and inevitable curiosity about anything apparently different to ourselves whilst others thought it was objectifying.

At the start of the group I had an uneasy feeling that finding black people 'interesting' was racist, without really being able to put my finger on why, as objections about 'natural curiosity' were evident too. Factors on both sides of this dilemma were explored and it was not so much resolved as a dilemma as better understood. I told the group that I had

previously facilitated a women's group of which I was a member, in exploring how childhood experiences of 'difference' may affect them now in adult life. Several group members reported touching accounts of innocent curiosity concerning differences between their own bodies and those of others. There were also clear examples of fear of difference in quite young children, particularly of smells and tastes.

Of course curiosity and interest in someone who is different to oneself is fine. We came to the conclusion that what is not fine is when, through fear or for any other reason, we do not relate to or acknowledge the essential humanness of another human being in a meeting with them.

What meaning does 'white' have?

The question of what meaning 'white' has for white people led on from our dilemma about trying to think about being white without thinking about our relationship to black people. We decided to ask a few people of our acquaintance to associate to the word 'white' and see how they viewed it. The answers given to me were as follows:

Interviewee 1	*Interviewee 2*	*Interviewee 3*
Blank	Sheet	Snow
Pure	Hair	Spiritual
Clear	Snow	Paper
Chef	Cloud	Heat
Paper	Leeds United	clear

Interviewee 4	*Interviewee 5*	*Interviewee 6*
Blank	Bright	Wall
Black	Colour	Clouds
Skin	Nothing	Wallpaper
Pale	Cat	
Snow	Sky	

Interviewee 7	*Interviewee 8*	*Interviewee 9*
Yellow	Green	Black
Blue	Sky	Paper
Green	Space	Chalk

We can see that the answers do not show a clear positive view of 'white'. (The only mention of, specifically, 'positive' words were given to us by interviewees 1 and 3, as I have shown above. One person mentioned 'pure' and another 'spiritual'.) In his book, Dalal (2002:135) insists that the colour white symbolises purity and goodness in western culture whilst 'black' symbolises 'evil' (see chapter 3 regarding Dalal's research (Dalal 2002:142 and 143) on the meaning of 'white' in The Bible). When I was able to talk to Dalal himself about this phenomenon at a lecture in which it was discussed, he expressed the view that people who had been asked were defending against their racist associations (see above). This was refuted in the White Group. Several people within the group thought that the colour white had some negative associations such as 'wishy washy' and the colour black had positive ones such as being intense and mysterious. We were aware that Dalal would regard these as rationalizations and finally Anna said something which cut below this. She said:

> that she thought our bad feelings about being white [because it might be wishy washy] were nevertheless built on a basic sense of confidence that comes from being part of the dominant race. Judy was very taken by this and said she could feel in herself what that meant. We also went on to speculate that the opposite was also true – that black pride may be built on a less secure base.
>
> *November 28th 2003*

This last point seems very important to me and fundamentally shows the effect of the power difference between black people and white. Whatever

we might say about different attitudes to the words black and white, it remains that the words are likely to impact more on black people as they experience being in the less dominant position.

Between this group and the next I attended the conference at which Dalal made the comments mentioned above. I described my discussion with Dalal to the group which was written up in my account and goes on to say:

> Judy had said she had thought about [his contention that those who responded to being asked for associations to the word 'white' were defending against more racist responses] but a context for asking the question had not been given. Farhad [Dalal] had said that most people would immediately have thought of 'white' having to do with being white skinned. We explored this a bit and were not so sure about it. It had definitely felt as if that had not occurred to the people we had asked. [Of course if you decide that this thought is unconscious there is nothing else one can say!] We wondered if associations to 'white' were changing in today's culture. [As I am writing this I am thinking that people today often have a more complex response to the idea of being 'good' in any case. Maybe there is a more questioning attitude to splitting good from bad in a definite way and that 'good' is often hypocritical. If that is the case then the way 'white' was seen in the past as being pure and unsullied doesn't have quite such a hold.]
>
> *13th Feb 2003*

The questions that arose from the group from this aspect of my inquiry are as follows:

- In today's western society are the words 'white' and 'black' losing the associations that they have had to the words 'good' and 'evil'?
- If this is the case does it say anything about racist attitudes?

- May it also have something to say about a more ambiguous attitude to 'good' and 'evil' as concepts?

It seems to me that an action that would, in the past, have been categorised as 'good', may now be seen as being more ambiguous. Post modern thought tends to accept more complexity (Hebdige 1996:176) and, in spite of tabloid journalism and some politicians who seem to divide the world very clearly into 'good' and bad', maybe this attitude is more prevalent in today's society than in the past. For instance a woman who steals to feed her child would not be judged as harshly as one who steals to feed her heroin addiction. (For further discussion of non-dualistic thinking see chapter 1.) When we talk of holding extreme attitudes on either side of a dilemma it is often said that the attitudes are 'black or white'. I have always understood this to mean that the attitudes are opposite to each other, just as 'black' and 'white' are opposite. The question of whether skin colour is also evoked when we use this term is also one to consider. I certainly find myself not using the term 'black and white' to indicate opposites because of its possible racist implication.

In order to explore this further, and to provide another cycle of action and reflection, I decided to ask some of my respondents what they thought about the colour white. In this context I asked Alice whom I interviewed following her responses to my questionnaire on the subject of shame and guilt in relation to racism (see chapter 4):

> J I wonder if you have any associations to the word white?
> A If you say whiteness to me it tends to say to me brightness and light. I am very interested in photography and white is the spectrum that includes all colours so whiteness is an image of brightness and light.
> J Right yes that is interesting. There is also a thought that in our culture whiteness means purity and goodness and truth. Does it have that sort of association for you?

A I think less so now than it used to. I think as a child the phrase whiter than white seemed to be around but I think that has faded now.

J Do you know what that is about, that fading?

A I think possibly it might just me maturing.

J If you're maturing then....

A Then I've realised that there is probably no such thing as whiter than white. Everything is just varying shades of grey.

9th January 2004

It is interesting that in this conversation Alice talked about a development in her thinking from seeing white as indicating or symbolising goodness and purity to more ambiguous meanings and that she thought this might be about how she herself is maturing and/or a change in the culture. I also find it interesting that in a later part of the same conversation she said that blackness was 'obviously' associated with darkness. She is seeing black in the way a physicist or a photographer might here as being 'a complete absence of light'. Dalal who says that a physicist would describe the colour black as being an optical event when no light is present', takes issue with this point saying that:

> The word black automatically conjures up a picture in the mind of the colour black. Similarly, the sign dark signifies the absence of light, and so the sign dark is now full of the meaning 'absence of light'.....As we have seen, absolute darkness is *beyond imagination* (italics in original), for how can one ever imagine an absence? Even as we try to imagine it, the associations of the word lead us to create something dark-like in our minds, that is something black (Dalal 2002:139).

He goes on to say that *"Black' is the symbolic representation of darkness'* (italics in original). His point is that we associate evil with darkness, darkness with black and black with 'black' people. Alice seems to have

provided an example of the association of dark with black. However, even if we do, perhaps naturally, conflate 'black' and 'dark', a point made in my conversation with Alice seems more satisfying to me: that absolute blackness and whiteness do not in fact exist. We can think this thought because we have become more able to think about ambiguities. *This same thinking,* and not because there is any real connection between the meanings we give to blackness and whiteness and the different colours of human skin, allows the projection of these meanings on to 'black' and 'white' people. This greater ability to think about ambiguities frees us to find a variety of associations to the word 'white' that were not connected with purity, goodness and brightness.

These thoughts about the meanings behind the words 'black' and 'white' were again thrown up in the air when I came to interview members of the white group after it had finished (see below).

Post-Group Reflections with Group Members

Having explored the different questions that arose within the White Co-operative Inquiry Group I decided to do two more turns of action and reflection cycles. One was to return to individuals within the group and ask them for further reflections on questions that arose for me out of the group exploration. The second turn of the cycle of reflection was to return to my original questions and see how far they have been answered or at least addressed.

I had follow-up conversations with all four of the other participants in the group. Two of these were taped interviews, another was written up from notes after the meeting as this person did not agree to a taped interview and the fourth was conducted by email.

Anna

It was my conversation with Anna that put a new light on our associations to the words 'black' and 'white'. She had read through a draft of this chapter and was very struck by the way that I had completely missed out one of the points she had made in the group. This was that, contrary to the apparent opinion of Dalal (Dalal 2002:ch 8), the words 'black' and 'white' have similar associations across many cultures to those often found in western culture. She also thought that my apparent refusal to acknowledge this point was evidence of prejudice on my part. She said:

> 'I do think there is a prejudice in here. The prejudice is about we in western society associate white with good and black with evil and its part of our heritage. Dalal makes a very strong point of it being about western society. The point I made is 'come on this is not just western society. These are universal associations, including among Africans'.'

I was very struck by the fact that, not only had I not included it in the account of the groups but that even now I had no memory of her telling me this. The fact that I had not taped the session and therefore been forced to see this omission is maybe regrettable but if I had taped the session, the extent of my reluctance to see it would not have been revealed.

Anna was an anthropologist so knew from field studies that the words 'black' and 'white' held similar meanings in African settings. She also showed me various passages from books on relevant anthropology so I have been able to study them since then.

Jacobson-Widding (1979) showed that people in the Lower Congo regard the colour black as 'definitely connected with evil-doers' (p 187). He said that the colour white, on the other hand, is connected with 'right,

righteousness, innocence, justice and social order' (p 218) as well as 'the means of attaining right and justice' such as 'reason intelligence, understanding, clear-sightedness, capacity for investigation etc.'. They belong to the world of social order and with the matrilineal principle (p 218). They are all considered to be 'good' and 'socially approved'.(Jaccobson-Widding 1979).[10]

Turner (1966) shows some comparative data about the associations of different peoples to the words 'black' and 'white' across various cultures worldwide. In Madagascar black is associated with what is 'inferior, unpleasant, evil, suspicious, disagreeable and undesirable' and white with 'light, hope, joy and purity' (p 72). For the Yoruba (in Nigeria) 'black is associated with night and night with evil' (p 73). In the Malay Peninsular a midwife puts a strip of black pigment from the eyebrows to the tip of the nose 'for the protection of women against 'the Blood Demon which stops a woman's courses and so prevents her bringing healthy children into the world'. (p 74) He goes on to say 'White is generally an auspicious colour, among the Sakai and other Malay peoples (p74). For the Cherokees (Native Americans), 'black is the colour of sorcery or witchcraft' and white 'represents peace and happiness' (p 75)[11].

I was shocked at having apparently completely blocked Anna's input to the group in which she showed these associations to the words 'white' and 'black' . She asked me why I thought I had done it. I said I was not sure but wondered if it was because it muddied the waters. Maybe I had thought that it might be more straightforward to think that these

[10] Red is also considered by Jacobson Widding and other authors but I will only consider the meanings surrounding the words 'black' and 'white' here.

[11] Since writing this chapter I have read in Bonnett (2000 p10 and 16) that people have been colour-coded as 'white' in the Middle East and China in the past. White skin indicates an elite, particularly as it suggested that the person did not have to work under the sun. Hall also pointed out that in Zaire 'white' is associated with death. The word 'Mpoto' is used to name the 'place where white people come from' and this transalated literally means 'the land of the dead.'

associations were purely Western. Using only western sources show white society in a bad light with black people clearly victims of our prejudiced assumptions.

Two thoughts emerge on further reflection. One is that the source of this information comes from anthropologists working in the sixties and seventies when there was less understanding of the slant that western people might put on information about other cultures. Whereas I am sure this does not completely invalidate this data, I would feel happier with it if I had been told about it myself by members of those particular nationalities and cultures.

My other thought is that, if the significance of these colours are similar throughout the world, this makes the use of the words 'black' and 'white' to describe people with different skin tones even more significant. Anna's understanding was that these are universal, archetypal symbols for evil on the one hand and goodness or purity on the other. It is shocking to think that the world is divided into 'black' people and 'white' people when these words evoke deeply held, archetypal associations, not just for those in the West, but for all peoples. It makes me wonder whether deciding to say 'black is beautiful' or 'white is wishy washy' has anything but a most superficial effect!

Eleanor

My post group meeting with Eleanor did not face me with similar challenges. I found it very moving, particularly the way in which she had allowed the learning from the group to touch her. She had started by thinking the group might be intimidating but actually found it 'inclusive, nurturing and supportive'. In particular it helped her with her work in an inner city school. In her words she said that she had begun to

'realise how far I am trying to get a grip on my student's world when in fact I need to stay even more with who I am and when I get things wrong it is done with a good heart and with the best will in the world and somehow it is going to be okay because it is 'respect' (she used the vernacular hand gesture). '

Eleanor must be doing something right as young people queue outside her room to see her for counselling.

Richard

Richard sent me responses on the email to my questions which gave his answers specific focus. He had originally not understood how the group could be of value without black people in it. He reiterated that during the group and commented on it in our email correspondence (see above). He now said that:

'Since the group disbanded, I have increasingly seen that my inability to elucidate on the experience of my own whiteness is itself a manifestation of a complacence so deep that I am only just recognising its existence. In a multiracial context I suppose this sense of belonging to the group that has a confident certainty of its own acceptability is what I would bring, consciously or otherwise. This does not seem a particularly honourable or helpful legacy.'

And

'At the time I often felt an essential weakness of the group was that it had no non-white members. I'm quite astonished at how far my sense of this has shifted. I now see how the shadow of whatever racism I may carry would have been conveniently covered up by the interesting dialogues that would no doubt have arisen in a

mixed-race group.'

It is interesting and encouraging for me that insights about this have continued since the group stopped meeting. Richard said that he did not generally work with non white clients. However one client:

> 'was a highly educated Indian who had been married to a white man and had lived a culturally 'white' life as an adult. I don't know whether her life experience might have de-emphasised the skin tone difference in the intersubjective field between us.'

I thought this was an extremely interesting point. I have found myself in a similar position with a client who had an Indian father. I did know that race could be an important theme for her but my knowledge of that was a little theoretical. When she denied its importance I let it drop until she became full of rage at a bus driver who called her a 'black bastard'. Unpicking the delicate threads of race in a situation like this is not easy but no doubt very important.

Sue

Sue preferred that the interview was not taped and so I made a note of the meeting directly after it finished. She has read and concurred with this.

The first thing she mentioned was that she thought the theme of guilt and shame had dominated the group. She noticed that we tended to go round in circles with this theme but had interestingly thought that this tends to happen when one feels guilty or ashamed. She remembered saying 'Awareness good – wallowing bad' and my saying that I must write that down. She asked if it had not struck me that way before. I said that I thought that the important thing was to learn from it rather than simply wallow in it and Sue agreed with this.

I said that I remembered how she had pointed out at the end that she had felt 'different' to others. Sue said that this 'difference' involved feeling less 'intellectual and affluent'. This led us to discuss our own experience of being with others when we feel 'different'. We both agreed that it is not enough and does not really help to be told one is 'accepted'. We need others to recognise the difference too. We thought it was interesting, in view of the subject of the group, that what happened to her was a parallel process to black people in white society and yet this was not picked up until the end of the group. In concentrating on our similarity – our whiteness – we did not see or acknowledge the differences in other dimensions of felt identity.

Talking about our own difficulties when we have felt 'different' led us to reflect that the group, in spite of not at first recognising this parallel process, was very tolerant of different opinions and people owning to 'unacceptable feelings'. Although the group could be quite challenging at times, it was also allowing and accepting.

We also spoke of the relevance of this to difficulties Sue had had with a black colleague in a multi racial environment. We reflected that her present work place was very 'white' and we wondered why that was. We thought that maybe, as the town was traditionally very 'white', work needed to be carried out to encourage the black communities that did live there to make use of resources to which they were entitled.

Reflecting now on my post-group discussion with Sue, I am struck again that a parallel process occurred under my nose, as it were, and, in spite of usually being sensitised to this phenomenon, I did not notice it. Although, in theory, Sue could have mentioned feeling different herself earlier in the group's life, it is understandable that she did not do so as her position of

'difference' also led her to feel more vulnerable. There were clues that I or other group members could have picked up on - Sue was quieter than others and was not known to group members before we started to meet. Maybe my own focus on our 'whiteness' and my anxiety to make sure that the group was researching this issue was a factor in leading me not to having more lateral vision. Of course the methodology does allow for attention to group dynamics. Heron and Reason advocate

> 'the creation of a climate in which emotional states can be identified, so that distress and tension aroused by the inquiry can be openly accepted and processed, and joy and delight in it and with each other can be freely expressed.' (Heron and Reason 2001)

From my conversation with Sue (and others) it seems that we did achieve a group where feelings could be expressed to a large extent, and she did bring up this issue before the group finished. However, in not being alert to Sue's sense of 'difference' before the end we limited the whole hearted-way in which she could participate and, amongst other things, lost some valuable information for the group by not recognising a parallel process. The learning from this will help me to be more alert to this possibility on another occasion.

My Own Further Reflections

My own reflection on the co-operative inquiry process, four months after it finished, is that it provided me with a place in which my ideas could be held and discussed with others who were interested in the same area. We were able to approach some difficult territory such as our own prejudice and explore it in a way which was new for all of us. It was possible to speak about our prejudices without having to hide them so that the underlying feelings and attitudes could be explored. At the same time we usually did not collude with these prejudices as we could disagree, such

as over the meaning of 'white', without attacking each other.

When we started we thought that it might be impossible to talk about whiteness without talking about blackness but this became more and more possible as we continued. Certainly we went through a process which, at least for some of us, led us to feel much more conscious of being white and what that means within a racialised environment. This process can be understood more fully by taking into account the fact that we were psychotherapists and counsellors. We were used, from our training and practice, to free floating discussions in which we encourage ourselves and others to dig below the surface of anything that arises. We do not readily 'take positions' without questioning them and we are used to owning negative or shameful thoughts whilst trusting that they will be received in the spirit of inquiry rather than blame. From the beginning I tried to model this mode of being by being open myself and inviting others to do likewise and modeled non-shaming responses to others. In the beginning I invited everyone to share what had led them to come and started by owning my own sense of shame and guilt about being white, citing some ways in which I could see my own racial prejudice.

Certainly the questions we had at the beginning were preoccupations of the group right up to the end. Although questions of this nature are never completely answered I did, for myself with the help of the group, reach tentative conclusions. Here are these conclusions followed by further inquiry questions or wonderings:

Can we talk about our racist thoughts?
I discovered, by engaging in exploratory dialogue, that we can talk about racist thoughts, particularly when we share an understand that we do so in order to learn more about our ourselves and our racism. *I wonder how far they can be resolved by voicing them*

Can we talk about whiteness without talking about blackness?
In that these terms only exist in relation to each other, of course we cannot. We did find that we could talk about being white without reference to black people if we understood ourselves to exist within a racial context. *How can I continue to be sensitive to my whiteness within a racialised environment and talk to others from this sense of awareness?*

Is it racist to find black people 'interesting'?
When this interest does not come from a 'superior' position in an institutional sense there is nothing wrong with finding anything 'interesting'. Insofar as it is impossible for a white person not to come from a superior position, maybe this is at the root of our discomfort with it. *Could black friends benefit by my 'interest'? What would happen if I allowed this interest and gave it a positive value?*

What are the meanings behind the word 'white'?
There were some differences of opinion in the group about meanings that lie behind this word but it seems to me that positive associations do lie behind the idea of whiteness and it does seem that these associations hold good across many cultures. *I am still not clear about whether or not the word 'white' is always* unconsciously *associated with white skin as Dalal suggested.*

Was the research valid?
In order to check how for the research was valid as a co-operative inquiry I have used Heron's validity procedures (Heron 1988). I have used each validity procedure he suggests as a heading to my reflections below:

Research cycling

Several turns of the cycle were evident in the inquiry. A number of research questions were identified and initially engaged with and reflected upon based on real experience in our lives. Our reflections on these questions were returned to in the light of further reflections later in the group. For myself I also reflected further about the meaning of the word white in two ways – one by asking interviewees for their thoughts and by talking about this with an author who had written on the subject (Dalal 2002). These experiences were brought back to the group for further discussion. I used post group interviews for a last turn of the cycle.

Balance of convergence and divergence

The group was both supportive and affirmative of group members whilst also not being collusive. There were several quite passionate disagreements, on the meaning of the word white and on the usefulness or otherwise of guilt and shame, for example, but no-one felt personally put down or injured by these.

Balance between experience and reflection

Maybe the balance between experience, or action, and reflection, during the time that the group was running, was more towards reflection than action. What we hoped to change in ourselves were our attitudes and assumptions which naturally led to reflection rather than out-in-the-world action. However we hoped that our reflections would lead to action and we can see from my post group interviews that it had in some cases. Richard was able to review his approach to a client and Sue noticed an increase in the number of black clients coming to see her. I have also found that my research has helped me in understanding my place in the world as a white person which has affected my relationships with others including my clients (see Conclusion). No doubt the learning that came from the group experience and which leads to action is subtle, is hard to quantify, and may carry on affecting our actions into the future.

Aspects of reflection

Most of the reflection was done within the group though group members did reflect between groups and brought that back for further thought. Some of the reflection I undertook was with others outside the group such as with my interviewees.

Falsification

The challenge we provided for each other did serve as a falsification procedure. The most striking example of this is Anna's correction of my note taking in her assertion that the words 'white' and 'black' had universal archetypal meanings. If a further cycle had not been undertaken at the end this piece of learning would not have occurred. The challenge of each cycle of reflection brings the potential for falsification or affirmation.

Balance between chaos and order

There was a certain amount of 'chaos' in the group as certain suggested tasks were not undertaken and the group tended to go off on tangents when certain topics held energy for the group. However the group met regularly and stayed focused on the topic of their experience of whiteness. Near the beginning it looked as if we might be waylaid by talking about racism in a wider way but we did successfully refocus in spite of whiteness seeming like 'nothingness' to us. This process started by my bringing attention to it and, as time went on, others helped to keep this focus. We discovered that initial difficulties may have reflected the depth of our taking whiteness for granted. We clearly needed to make an intellectual and emotional effort to get to grips with what we hold outside awareness and unquestioningly.

Management of unaware projections

Sue's difficulties with feeling vulnerable in the group were not discovered

until the end and this would have been better uncovered earlier. For me, ambivalence about taking authority was maybe more present than I was aware at the time. The discipline of action and reflection cycles might have improved if I had taken more authority, but something of what arose spontaneously might have been lost. These difficulties did not seriously impede the task of the group which managed to stay in good communication most of the time.

Sustaining authentic collaboration

The group were very engaged with each other and supported each other in their own individual inquiry as well as trying to engage with questions together.

Open and closed boundaries

Most of our exploration was between ourselves as a group. However others were sometimes consulted as in the exercise about the meaning of the word white and my conversation with the author, Dalal and his challenging hypotheses on whiteness.

Coherence in action

The action we have all taken may take some time to come to fruition. Each of us took away a more complex sense of our whiteness and that has started to affect how we are in a diverse society. My post-group interviews with group members do show this, though less clearly in the case of Anna where both of us became caught up in the interview in my not hearing an important point she made in the group.

Variegated replication

I hope that my writing about this inquiry will lead to others doing likewise. For me, the very task of reflecting on being white in as open and clear sighted a way as possible is part of my political contribution to changing

myself in my environment.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown what I learnt by joining with co-researchers to understand more about my racial identity as a white person in the context of the journey that we all took together. Forming a co-operative inquiry group was certainly productive for my inquiry as it has helped me to become more conscious of my racial identity as white person and what this means in terms of my privileged position in society. Working with others helped me in two ways. The first is that it provided me with support in a task that can otherwise be a lonely undertaking. Not many white people consider this issue and, I suspect, may even ridicule it as 'politically correct' nonsense.

The second is that it provided me with people who challenged my assumptions and ideas so that I was obliged to look at them more closely. One example of this is my assumption was that 'black' and 'white' were symbolized as 'good' and 'bad' only in the west. This is clearly not so as anthropological evidence shows (Turner 1966; Jaccobson-Widding 1979). However, through robust dialogue in which contrary points of view were raised, I was confirmed in my notion that guilt and shame could be productive feelings for white people. With the help of this dialogue, I now have a more complex way of understanding the place that guilt and shame could have for white people in understanding themselves within a racialised environment (see the next chapter). They are a prod to become more conscious of how dominant nations have used 'black' people.

If I were to set up another co-operative inquiry I would be clearer about the issues of authority in the group and more clearly own the authority that the situation inevitably gave me. I would notice and comment on group dynamics such as the difficulty that Sue had about feeling different. I could

have set up clearer tasks for the action/reflection process though there may have been losses in this too as more of my attention may have been on the group process and less on my own experience and learning.

I certainly found the group to be less 'neat' in terms of the processes of action and reflection than is described in the literature (Heron 1996). I was helped in my understanding of this by Ladkin (2004) who describes the complexities of co-operative inquiry groups where a peer group has been initiated by one member who is engaged in a more formal research process. She confirms the difficulties arising from this process, 'normalising' some of the anxiety the sheer complexity of the task involved for me.

The next chapter picks up on a major theme that came out of the co-operative inquiry group – that of guilt and shame concerning racism in white people. My explorations concerning this area were present for me before setting up the group and were concurrent with it. The group provided one context for this inquiry.

CHAPTER FIVE

An Exploration of Guilt and Shame in Individual and Societal Contexts

The sooner we admit our crimes to others,
To other peoples, creeds, genders, species,
The better and lighter the human
Future will be.
The more we deny, the greater will be the horrors
And vengeances of time
That wait silently in the wings
Of the bloody drama of our future
From *Mental Fight* by Ben Okri

Introduction

In the previous two chapters, which concern my inquiry into my own experience of being white and 'western' within a racial environment, I became increasingly aware of feeling guilty and ashamed. This was so striking to me that I decided to look into this in more detail. I wondered about the effect that these feelings have on me, how far they may be productive or useful as feelings and whether they are commonplace among white people like myself in relation to racism. It occurred to me that they could be useful feelings in understanding my position as a white person or could be irrelevant and indications of an obsession with my own feelings. It led to the question: Can guilt and shame be useful in drawing attention to the privilege of whiteness?

I decided that, if I was to engage with this question, I must first understand the nature of guilt and shame in any context and their foundation for individuals and society. In this chapter I therefore introduce the area of guilt and shame in relation to racism, briefly explore the place that shame and guilt have in personal psychology, particular how they affect our sense of

self, as well as in society, and what generative functions they may serve in our exploration of racism. I then go on to think in more detail about how guilt and shame's place within individuals and in society is relevant to shame and guilt in relation to being white, particularly the function that guilt and shame play as a response to white supremacy and racism.

My questions as I started this inquiry therefore were:

- What role do guilt and shame play in my life and those of other people?
- Can guilt and shame be generative – in other words can they further my learning about myself and lead to more creative and fulfilling lives and relationships?
- Can the guilt and shame that I feel about racism be generative?
- Can the ways that other people feel guilt and shame (or not) about racism enlighten me about the place that shame and guilt about racism plays in my own life?
- Can writers in the fields of psychotherapy and sociology help to enlighten me about how I might use shame and guilt about racism positively or negatively in my life?

Before describing and exploring the inquiry that attempts to engage with these questions, I will follow the path I took that led me to inquire into this in more depth. I was aware that in my earlier explorations into racism in psychotherapy, I rushed to show how I had learnt the lessons of racism before fully owning my guilty feelings. I suspected that white people, including myself, tend to project unwanted destructive and inadequate parts of themselves on to black people. Altman explores this by considering how white people avoid a sense of guilt:

> '....on one hand the defensive need to deny that certain unacceptable psychic characteristics are indeed part of me, as I have just described. On the other hand is the need to ward off guilt: the pain of knowing that damage has been

done to human beings like myself, by me, or in my name, or with my collusion, or passive consent. Avoidance of guilt is a powerful force motivating continual reinforcement of racist attitudes, for to the extent that we experience black people as 'me', as people with feelings just like mine, realizing the suffering to which they have been subjugated could generate an intolerable level of pain.' (Altman 2003:97)

In struggling with similar feelings of guilt whilst on the equal opportunities committee of my professional body, I wrote a letter to its journal in which I said:

'I also have an emotional response which is very familiar to me in working in this field. It is one of pain and shame and guilt. The feeling is very special to 'getting it wrong' in the area of 'equal opportunities'. My responses include wanting to protect myself, to hide, to defend myself, to punish myself. Then I tell myself that all this is unnecessary and that debate and dialogue are healthy and lead to a deepening understanding. I make a statement like the one above. Then I breathe a sigh of relief. I am not a bad person after all (I hope).'

May 1999

I know from speaking to people that I am close to, including colleagues in the white co-operative inquiry group, that others tend to have similar feelings. Maybe it makes sense of the painful interactions endemic in this area. I say this in the hope that an open acknowledgement of this state of affairs may help us to move forward with the important task of working across difference in the field of psychotherapy.

I also wrote an example of this 'getting it wrong' in a piece of writing called *Englishness* that I wrote in preparation for my PhD transfer paper when exploring an incident on a training course:

'I noticed that all the energy in the group was between [a white group member] and the black women in the group. Picking up on this I asked what other 'English' people in the group felt. This laid bare my own assumptions and prejudices. Of course not all the white people were English and two of the black people were! I would like to explore the complexity of my feelings and responses here. They go something like this:

Searching for excuses: 'Of course I know this, it was a mere slip of the tongue, it was because I am writing about Englishness at home. I don't normally make such a crass error.'
Feeling ashamed: 'Shit! How could I expose myself like this? My credibility has flown out of the window.'
Fear: 'I will now be attacked and demolished.'
Angry and defensive: 'For God's sake it isn't a hanging matter. Most of the white people are English, they would just rather pretend they were not in this company and the black people's parents were not English.'
Interest. I am interested in my response and want to understand it.

My first response is to hide and lick my wounds as I fear digging myself further into a pit. However I am just able to recognise that these are familiar feelings and have the thought that others might have this painful mix of responses. I point out the complexity of my own feelings in the hope that at least what has happened can give some permission for us all to explore this when we are caught in these moments of 'getting it wrong' without just flying to defensive positions or going into hiding.'

November 2000

This piece of writing shows how I used diaries to help me to reflect systematically on my experience in order to understand it more clearly. My PhD supervision group at the time challenged me to focus more on myself and my own whiteness and in response I wrote:

'I think that in order to do this work I need to be able to stay with the complexity

of the issues involved. Some of these come from living with the political and societal realities that affect our psychological and interpersonal experience:

- Everyone who is English has to live in some way with the reality of their history – that their country dominated the world in a way that was very damaging to many nations while unquestioningly imagining that they were doing everyone a favour. Much of England's wealth is still based on exploitation of the wealth of other nations and peoples – including my own.
- That as first world countries go, England is not particularly powerful or influential.
- That England is still in a powerful position in relation to much of the rest of the world as a 'first world' power and that in colluding with multinational companies is still exploitative. (There may be other ways in which it is exploitative as well).
- That England still seeks to protect its interests by excluding those in need who apply for asylum.'

November 2000

In remembering past work I am very aware of how much easier it is to jump straight into the active mode of righting wrongs whilst missing out the stage of owning to guilt which is far from comfortable. It is also easier to try to make an identification with black people by stressing areas in which I have been on the receiving end of prejudice. In doing so I am possibly perpetuating a subject/object split by 'joining the other side' and seeing myself as 'oppressed' rather than allowing myself to feel the guilt of the oppressor.

The experience of guilt and shame

I will now turn my attention to exploring ways in which guilt and shame are used more generally by individuals and in society in order to help me look at how this might apply to white people in relation to racism. Although this became an important part of my research I describe this briefly here as this exploration is not the main focus of this inquiry.

My own thoughts led me to believe that there are occasions when it is important to own guilt but I came across many who thought that shame and guilt were useless emotions and burdensome for those we feel guilty towards. In the light of this thought I decided to undertake an inquiry into the phenomena of guilt and shame to begin from first principles rather than start with ideas that have been written in the literature. Having gained that perspective I look at what psychotherapy as well as sociological theorists have to say about shame and guilt.

An Inquiry into the phenomenology of shame and guilt

In first approaching this subject I wanted to know more about the *felt* experience of guilt and shame in order to hear about others' experience from an embodied rather than a cognitive place. I thought that the more the responses were grounded in actual felt experience, the more I would learn about how people really experienced guilt and shame rather than how they understand them as intellectual concepts. I therefore emailed 65 people with a questionnaire.

I did not do so to 'prove' anything but to provide a snapshot of the felt experience of guilt and shame. Any of these individuals may have answered differently on a different day and if they had had a conversation with each other they may have agreed on reflection with other people and then have added to what they had said or even altered or refined it. They could have strongly disagreed with others and that may have led to them altering, adding to or confirming their views. Another day different things may have occurred to them. If several say the same thing that is interesting in itself but does not give it more validity. One view that is quite different from all the others may throw an interesting light on the subject.

Nevertheless I have found this exercise to be valuable as it has given me some impressions of the kinds of experiences and ideas that others have about shame and guilt. These have helped to spark off, confirm and challenge my own ideas. I was not interested, therefore, in a statistically valid outcome, but to engage friends and colleagues in helping me think about this. I chose people from my email list with whom I had had similar sorts of conversations and were used to inquiring in a thoughtful way. Of the 65 I had 16 responses (about a quarter). The questionnaire I sent was as follows:

A Little Inquiry into the Phenomenology of Shame and Guilt

I am interested in finding out about people's experience of feelings of shame and guilt. If you are interested I would be very grateful if you could give some thought to the following:

1. If you think of something that makes you feel ashamed
where do you experience this in your body?
How would you describe the feeling?
Does the feeling suggest any images, shapes, sounds, tastes etc to you?

2. If you think of something that makes you feel guilty
where do you experience this in your body?
How would you describe the feeling
Does the feeling suggest any images, shapes, sounds, tastes etc to you?

3. Could you finish these sentences (taking your first thought but allow yourself more than one answer if you wish):
When I feel ashamed I want to.....
When I feel guilty I want to.....
If I never felt ashamed I would be.....
If I never felt guilty I would be.....
What kinds of things make you feel ashamed?

4. What kinds of things make you feel guilty?

5. Do you have any other comments about being ashamed or guilty?

November 2002

The data of my findings are included in appendix 6.

Having received replies from about one third of the people I contacted, I immersed myself in the answers so that I received a sense of the kinds of images, feelings and sensations that my respondents had given me. My first impression was that my respondents found the experience of both extremely painful, with shame possibly being the more painful of the two.

Later I sorted the replies into those that were similar to each other. I found that in answers to where shame and guilt are experienced in the body, there is some similarity between the two although guilt was reported to be experienced in the heart and chest and shame in the face, neck and chest. The *descriptions* of the two feelings, as opposed to the place they are experienced in the body, tended to be more dissimilar although there this was some similarity in feel.

My question about what made people feel guilty and ashamed revealed that my respondents felt ashamed of what was perceived as a fault in themselves and guilty about hurting others though they might have felt ashamed because they judge themselves to be guilty. This leads me to tentatively wonder if guilt is in fact a cognitive idea. The *feeling* is of shame *because* of the guilt – albeit with a certain tint – as this time shame arises from guilt rather than

other reasons for feeling shame, such as being over exposed. We could call it 'guilt-shame' as opposed to 'exposure-shame'. If this were the case, guilt would be simply a matter of doing something that transgressed an ethical, social or legal code. We may accuse ourselves or be accused by others of this transgression. In either case there may or may not be agreement between ourselves and others as to whether or not we are in fact guilty. If we *do* think that we are guilty then we feel ashamed. If we do not think we are guilty then we do not feel ashamed.

I asked my respondents what it would be like never to feel ashamed. The answers ranged from feeling that it would be inhuman never to feel ashamed and feeling that it would be liberating. About never feeling guilty at all, there was a divide between those who feel they would be immoral and those who would feel lighter and happier. Taking both shame and guilt together the split goes something like this: if I never felt guilty or ashamed I would be 1, inhuman and immoral or be 2, liberated, light and happy.

I have put some analysis of my findings from this questionnaire in Appendix 8. It will inform my understanding of guilt and shame in my further inquiry into the relevance that guilt has to people's response to being white.

Considerations arising from this questionnaire regarding the 'white' inquiry
The questionnaire brought to light two ideas in particular which were interesting in my wider inquiry into being white.

1. That guilt may in fact be guilt-shame – shame about being, or thinking oneself to be guilty, rather than shame which exposes our supposed inadequacies. This is relevant to my inquiry because in regard to being white, there is nothing *intrinsically* wrong with the colour of anyone's skin but we may feel guilt-shame about how

white people do or have treated black people (more about this below).

2. That there is a dilemma between the importance of acknowledging guilt on the one hand and becoming weighed down by unnecessary guilt which can lead to injuries to our sense of self and/or burden the people about whom one feels guilty. All of this is taken further below.

Some ideas about shame and guilt from psychotherapy theorising

In western psychotherapy, concepts of shame were not much explored until relatively recently, although notions of guilt were central in classical psychoanalysis. Freud stressed its role in the resolution of the oedipal conflict (Freud 1924). Klein (1946:176) understood babies as coming into this world full of destructive fantasies that could only be tolerated by splitting the mother into a good one and a bad one. Becoming mature enough to understand that their attacks on the bad mother also hurt the good as they are one and the same, led to what she called the 'depressive position' where the child feels guilt and the need to repair the damage that had been done to the mother. This same 'position' was called the 'stage of concern' by Winnicott (1988:73) who took a more benign position about the emotional experiences of babies.

In the 1960s, guilt, which requires the internalization of an apparatus of self-repression, seemed to play a less important part in western society generally as can be seen in child care practices which stressed the original innocence of children. Individuals tended to become more flexible and adaptable to rapidly changing encounters and social circumstances. The mores of western society were changing in many fields. It was becoming more secular and child care practices were now being informed by psychotherapists like Winnicott (1964) and Bowlby (1953) who tended to be more child-centred. They promoted the approach of supporting the growing

child's sense of him/herself as loved and welcomed. In that context the harm that shaming children does to their sense of self became more evident and the use of shaming mechanisms in socialisation processes became questioned. A more individualistic society requires flexible, self-supporting individuals with a positive sense of self enabling them, as individuals, to respond and adapt to changing circumstances without relying on group support.

In the light of this it is unsurprising that none of the theorists I have come across have much to say about shame and even less about a positive value of shame as a self-regulating mechanism. There are two exceptions to this that I will come to later. Most theorists understand shame to be connected to a sense of self, as in feeling ashamed *of oneself,* thus seeing shame as a feeling with no external referent. Shame is experienced as a narcissistic injury so that the sense of oneself as good disappears as is acknowledged by some of the respondents to the questionnaire. Guilt, however, is felt in relation to someone else. Guilt is about transgressions, and shame is about shortcomings. This is also borne out by my respondents' answers to the questionnaire. However, as I pointed out above, one can lead to the other, as in guilt-shame, as we can feel ashamed because we are, or think ourselves to be, guilty. Psychotherapy theorists tend to concentrate on the roots of shame and guilt in childhood where the pointing out of shortcomings and transgressions are probably most painfully felt and are often used by adults to control children. A child's sense of shame frequently arises from a parental failure to show the child that s/he is loved unconditionally. Kohut writes about the mirroring function of parents for whom the child is a 'gleam in the eye' (Kohut 1984:192 - 193). The child looks into the eyes of the parent or carer and knows that s/he is beautiful and loved. If s/he looks and sees that s/he is disregarded, s/he feels ashamed.

Mollon (1993:52) says that shame 'seems to be associated with a sudden, disruptive awareness of separateness, of *self and other*' (italics in original). In his view, shame is associated with a devastating loss of a cohesive sense of self which is slowly emerging in the child and leads either to a shame-prone adult or one who defensively becomes shame-less. Mollon (1993:44) mentions two defences against shame – the avoiding of exposure to risks so as not to be shamed, and what he calls 'countershame' or what Lewis (1971) calls 'bypassed shame' where feelings of shame are cut off and nothing is felt at all. This is borne out in the responses to my questionnaire by the prevalence of the desire to hide in the face of shame. No doubt white people hide in the face of shame too, as we will see below.

Stolorow and Atwood (1992), from the Intersubjective School (see chapter 6), say little about shame in so many words. Their theories develop further the need to support the growing sense of self of the child through a process of mirroring and correct affect attunement so that the child is received and validated. Without much needed mirroring they say that the child

> 'may 'conclude' that his own unmet needs and emotional pain are expressions of disgusting and shameful defects in the self and thus must be banished from conscious experiencing (Stolorow and Atwood 1992:55).'

Jacobs, a Gestalt therapist who also trained with the Intersubjectivisists (Stolorow et al, and see chapter 3), writes much more directly about shame (Jacobs 1996). She points to the way that feelings of shame may lead people to enter therapy and this is compounded by feeling ashamed of their very need for this. She says that shame is a 'gatekeeper' and interferes with our ability to feel our feelings and thus our capacity for contacting and self-regulation. She suggests that successful therapy is contingent upon the therapist's capacity to tolerate a risk of shameful exposure and shows resilience in the face of shame (1996:1). She points out that it often feels

shaming to the client that the therapist is more important to the client than visa versa but that this can be resolved more easily if a person's sense of self is not 'coloured by shame'. For those whose self image is 'laced with shame' this differential can be exquisitely painful (Jacobs 1996:2). When a therapist is white and a client is black, feelings of shame may well be very complex and often remain unexplored, with both therapist and client experiencing shame in different ways. She stresses that if the therapist can show real sensitivity to the client's sense of shame and resolve the disruption that takes place when there is shame in the dialogue between them, then a truly transformative process has occurred.

In my own work with psychotherapy clients I have been aware of the need to walk very carefully with the fragile sense of self of some of my clients. During the therapy some of them have come to an understanding that they are good enough as human beings to be loved and I have felt that they have come to accept my care of them. Others have come with genuinely harmful things they have done to others and I have had to struggle with my own sense of judgement about that. Together we have managed to work back to the fragile and tenuous sense of self that can be loved and accepted. One asylum seeker client had lied to me about the basic story of her life and, although her actual experiences made this very understandable, facing up to telling me that she had lied was so shameful that she could not bear to come again in spite of my encouragement. I now wonder whether my very understanding of her need to lie was in itself shaming. No doubt my own sense of shame about my relative good fortune made the interaction between us hard to reflect on adequately.

Jacobs also says that shame can be positive in that, because we as human beings feel shame, we are able to empathise with others' sense of shame. She acknowledges that it is human to experience shame and, in our

humanity, we know others' shame and can develop a sensitivity to know how we might avoid shaming them.

The experience of guilt and shame in white people about racism

With the background of these thoughts about guilt and shame I now turn my attention to the experience of shame and guilt in white people. As described in chapter 3, part of this inquiry involved a co-operative inquiry for white therapists in which we explored how we felt about our racial identity as 'whites'. This emerged as a theme, particularly but not solely for me. Views about guilt in this context held by members of the group ranged from 'guilt is 'useless' in that it is a burden to others who are expected to absolve us', to 'I often feel wracked by guilt which is probably neurotic' to 'as white people we ought to feel guilty'. Some of these themes I explore below as well as further material that arose in the group.

While the group was current I immersed myself in an exploration of the part that guilt and shame play as a response to both personal and institutional, endemic racism. In order to further my inquiry into guilt and shame in this context I discussed it in the group, devised and sent out another questionnaire and explored various theorists and papers (Dyer 1997; Brandyberry 1999; Dalal 2002) which caste some light on this subject. I start here with the questionnaire.

A questionnaire regarding shame and guilt experienced by white people in regard to racism

Having had many interesting responses from my questionnaire on guilt and shame *per se,* and feeling that responses in the White Co-operative Inquiry Group were throwing up further questions, particularly about the usefulness or not of guilt and shame in white people, I decided to ask the same group of 65 people (as those approached to answer my last questionnaire) for responses regarding racism.

With the same caution as to its validity that I had with the first one, I devised a questionnaire as follows:

Inquiry into Guilt and Shame felt in Regard to Racism

1. Did you fill in the questionnaire A little Inquiry into Guilt and Shame sent to you in November? Yes/No
2. Do you consider yourself to have, consciously or unconsciously, racist attitudes or beliefs?
3. To what extent do you feel ashamed or guilty about having racist attitudes? (Mark yourself from 1 – 5 on a scale which has 1 as very guilty and 5 as not guilty at all. If you feel that shame and guilt have different marks then give yourself a mark for each making clear which is which).
4. Do you consider yourself to be a beneficiary of endemic racism in society?
5. To what extent do you feel guilty or ashamed about this? (mark yourself from on a scale from 1 – 5, see question 3).
6. If you do feel any shame or guilt do you think these form any purpose, useful or not?
7. To what extent do you feel shame or guilt about racist manifestations that your own country perpetrated in the past such as the colonialisation of other countries? (mark yourself from on a scale from 1 – 5, see question 3).
8. Would you like to expand on any of your answers or do you have any other comments that you would like to add? *Judy Ryde January 2002*

There were 14 respondents to this questionnaire, 9 of whom also answered the first one (Question 1)

All the answers to the questions can be found in appendix 7. I have considered these answers below and will describe how I followed up some responses with in-depth interviews which in turn opened up further reflection. As will be seen, reflecting on my own responses to their answers

helped to open up interesting avenues for further inquiry. Here follow the ways in which I have pursued the question further.

Racist attitudes and beliefs

To the question: *'Do you consider yourself to have, consciously or unconsciously, racist attitudes or beliefs?'* 12 answered 'yes' and 2 answered 'no. One of these was a white person who did not regard herself as a racist and therefore did not answer subsequent questions. The other one was black. This has brought up an interesting issue for me. He was the only black person I asked to engage with this inquiry and I had clearly not thought about the questionnaire from this point of view. It reveals, however, my automatic white consciousness by assuming that all those that I did contact were white. This respondent answered my previous questionnaire without his being black emerging as an issue. I find his answers are nevertheless an interesting counterpoint to the others.

One respondent, called Alice, (not a therapist) had a particularly interesting response to my second question about whether she had racist attitudes or beliefs:

> 'Yes, though I wish I didn't. But I do feel nervous of black people, without any good reason. Also, I couldn't really fancy a Negro, so there is some fundamental sense of difference there. On the other hand, I do have one or two Negro friends, and once I get to know them my nervousness disappears. My nervousness is fundamentally of <u>all</u> strangers, and I think is accentuated by the enhanced "strangeness" of Negro appearance and body language. This is much more true of black people than of Asians, and definitely comes from some unconscious promptings.'

My reflections at the time on this answer to the questionnaire were as follows:

'It is interesting that she uses the 'politically incorrect' term 'Negro'. My sense is that this does not in her case show disrespect to black people. All her responses here and in the rest of the questionnaire are thoughtful, own her own racism and show that she knows that her feelings about black people reveal herself rather than say anything about black people. Her response here shows that she considers the 'strangeness', maybe the not-like-herness, of black people to be at the root of her fear.' *Note made in August 2003*

This reflection led to further action as I decided to interview her to push forward my inquiry further. Here is an extract from that taped conversation:

J. The other thing I wanted to talk to you about was the use of the word 'Negro' which you have used just now and you used in your....which you.....because that is often thought of as politically incorrect as a word to use and I wondered if you used it as a.....

A. [interrupting] I'm using it in a very specific biological sense as a racial type. The Negro races who.....I mean not all black people are Negroes.

J. Yes, I think these days there is a question about whether we can make that kind of distinction.

A. Probably, yes, but people with certain racial characteristics which.....

J These days the usual word is African. Do you mean African with a broad nose and woolly hair?

9th January 2004

I cringe at myself for saying that and then wonder why. Is a sense of shame alerting me to something amiss? On reflection maybe it is because it betrays my underlying assumption that a thin nose and straight hair is the norm or even that it is more beautiful. The nervousness about talking about this issue is evident in the hesitation with which we speak of it. The clarity that I am beginning to develop, and which now normally alerts me to a western-centred way of thinking, had deserted me. The conversation continues:

A. Of course not all Africans are of that type. Most North Africans are not for example. So that's really an unclear word but yes if we are talking about sort of Africans with curly hair and large lips……

J. [interrupting] I think the reason why these words have that kind of *frisson* to them is that they are often used as pejorative but also the whole thing about race as a concept is questioned as well – that there is any significant difference between them other than genetic variations that come out…..

A. That's right. And I wouldn't question the equality of that but we have to acknowledge that people do have different genetic structures.

J. But of course when they start intermarrying with other people it starts dissolving

What I wonder as I write this is why it is necessary to make these distinctions at all but then remember that we are talking about what frightens Alice. She perceives people she calls 'Negroes' to be the most different and therefore the most fear provoking. She knows this is not a rational feeling. She is brave to talk about these feelings which I imagine are often too shameful to be admitted. A little later in the conversation I say:

J. Just to say then……in using the word Negro you are saying that they are the people who look the 'most different to me' on the face of it,

A. On the face of it yeah.

J. And therefore of the ones that….[pause]

A. It is superficial…..[pause]

J. Yes but it has an effect that is based on something unconscious in you – that fear of strangers so that is what you are talking about really. One of the questions is 'are you afraid of other sorts of differences' but you are saying 'that is the most different' and therefore the most fearful?

A. I think I am yes.

It does seem then that it was Alice's sense of guilt that alerted her to an understanding that her fear of black people was irrational. She says she

does 'work well with black people' when she gets to know them and manages to get over her fear through gaining familiarity. At one point I asked her about guilt:

> A. Well very probably I felt that this should not be. I had been brought up to believe that there was absolutely nothing wrong with, for example, mixed marriages if the 2 people were in love with each other and therefore I suppose, yes, there was some sort of educational process here then that meant that when I actually tried to put it into practice – well just saying yes when someone asked me out instead of no. Theoretically there should not have been a problem. In practice there was, so that I felt in some way I had not lived up to what I believed in.

In other words Alice felt that her espoused values and those she lived by were not congruent with each other. Alice was struggling with difficult feelings and was prepared to share these with me however difficult this process was.

I continued to wonder about her use of the word Negro, which after her explanation still did not seem congruent. I decided to inquire further by asking Rotimi, the black respondent to the questionnaire, what *he* thought of the word.

For him this word evoked a time when 'Negroes' were thought to be like animals. In answer to my query he said:

> 'That is really interesting because it reminds me of the pseudo-scientific theories about Africans being like animals. They were so unlike us that they must be different and the word 'negro' was used to describe people in that way. Language is very important because language is power. Because negro was used then and is still used now people are still in that way of thinking.'
>
> *February 2004*

Rotimi thought that by facing up to the way this idea is evoked it might help to dissolve the fear:

> If people used the name of countries where these people come from I think she would start thinking differently about them. She would know that Africans have a history.
> J. It might mean that she feels less fear?
> R. Yes very much so – that is what these scientific theories are about - Africans are like animals and we should be afraid of them.

He also pointed out that black people hadn't chosen the way they are described and this was compounded by the colour black that has negative associations of darkness and evil:

> 'Since slavery people of African descent have not been called something they have determined themselves: slaves, niggers, then from niggers to negros to coloured and coloured to African American and in this country, coloured, black British, Afro/Caribbean. All these names that have not been determined by Africans themselves. Even the word 'black' I have problems with. Black is always associated with the negative whether you like it or not.'
>
> *February 2004*

No doubt at one level Alice was far from thinking that Africans were like animals. She was aware that her fear was irrational but maybe Rotimi touched on something important about certain words evoking past fears and keeping them alive, and was imposed by others in order to facilitate imperialist domination of indigenous peoples. There is a conflict between Alice's insistence that the word 'negro' is merely a straight forward description and Rotimi's rejection of the word as it has often been used pejoratively and was not chosen by African people themselves. It may be a good example of the kind of difficulty that can arise when considering

politically correct language that I discussed in the Introduction to this thesis. Although Alice may be consciously unaware of the complex dynamics behind the use of this word, it does carry these resonances whether she intends them or not. I draw from this that it is important to take into account, not only what we think we *intend* by our communication, but the meaning it may hold for others.

Shame and guilt about racist attitudes

The third question was: *'To what extent do you feel ashamed or guilty about having racist attitudes? (mark yourself from 1 – 5 on a scale which has 1 as very guilty and 5 as not guilty at all. If you feel that shame and guilt have different marks then give yourself a mark for each making clear which is which).'* [12]

Most scored guilt and shame with the same mark but three didn't. Two felt much more ashamed than guilty and one felt more guilty than ashamed. Generally the respondents felt more guilty than ashamed with one person putting 4 and another 5 (towards the not ashamed end) under shame. There were some interesting comments including:

> 'I feel guilty about my nervousness of black people, knowing that it is totally unreasonable, but on the other hand I do not consciously espouse common myths about them, e.g. that they have lower IQs or are more inclined to crime. That is just nonsense.'

[12] I asked the question in this form so that it would be easy for people to give a sense of the extent of their feelings. I thought that busy people may be able to indicate *how much* they felt using this scale. This contrasted with asking them to write in more detail or give a yes or no answer. I also welcomed and encouraged further writing by asking for this in question 8. Although this gives the questionnaire a somewhat traditionally positivistic 'feel' as though I want to find statistics on this subject, this is not my intention. As I have said above I am interested to have my own feeling and views challenged and/or confirmed and see the questionnaire as part of a dialogue with the people I have questioned. I have sent my writing back to those who responded and asked them for further thoughts.

And

> 'I find this a very difficult differentiation. I think I feel more ashamed about doing as little as I do to address the issue e.g. I would not challenge every single racist attitude I came across in another person and within myself. I only realize this when I'm asked to fill in this sort of questionnaire. So I would put ashamed:
> 1. Guilt – this is difficult for a different reason – I was born White and British so that gives me a cultural inheritance that I would sometimes like to disavow but can't. I feel guilty that I don't do more even when this isn't observed by anyone else, at about a level of 3.'

The first response brings out how we may know something intellectually but have a different emotional reaction. In the second response I wonder about the way that guilt can drive us to have unreasonable expectations of ourselves such as challenging every racist remark we hear. The complex feelings about wanting to disavow a cultural inheritance is also painfully clear here, and one I can identify with.

Being a beneficiary of endemic racisim

Question 4 was '*Do you consider yourself to be a beneficiary of endemic racism in society?'* Of the thirteen respondents one said that she was not a beneficiary without elaborating on this. All the rest felt that they are such beneficiaries including the black person who interestingly said:

> Yes – only in the sense that I have been 'allowed to advance' as a member of the minority black middle classes.

This brings up an interesting class issue which is entangled with that of race. I ask myself whether he feels that if he behaves like white people and in a 'good middle class way' he will be 'allowed to advance'.

I decided to interview this respondent, Rotimi, and this verbatim report comes from the same interview that I reported above. He felt that there were both class and race issues mingled here:

> R. As far as race is concerned I often think about the issue of tokenism where by the 'powers that be' want to see black people in the right places – so as to fulfill racial quotas etc.
> J. Then they can't be accused of racism?
> R. Yes exactly. [He goes on to describe what happens in institutional racism and the way he feels used.]
> J. That must feel pretty awful.
> R. Yes, but at the same time someone said to me, maybe it was yourself, 'think of yourself as a pioneer.' So yes, whether I like it or not I am a member of the middle classes because I am in a well paid job.
>
> *February 2004*

He was clear that the issues of race and class were intertwined and that, while he can feel guilty about advancing where others cannot, 'stepping on them' to get to where he wants to go, he is also a pioneer who is 'standing on the shoulders' of others, such as his parents, who have paved the way for him.

Another of the respondents thought that, although she benefited by endemic racism, she was also on the receiving end:

> 'Yes and no, as a white person yes, as a Jewish person I suffer from endemic racism.'

Two others further illuminated areas in which endemic racism is shown up:

> 'I think we all are indirectly – many black and Asian people do the grotty jobs that we don't want. A lot of that starts with them not getting enough

encouragement at school, and not having enough successful role models. (My cousin teaches in a largely Asian school in Bradford, and despairs of persuading her pupils that there are higher aspirations than taxi driving.)' [respondent's brackets]

And

'Yes as I am part of the white majority I know that I must have / will have benefited in a wide variety of areas....employment, education etc'

Guilt and shame in endemic racism

Question 5 is: *To what extent do you feel guilty or ashamed about this [endemic racism]? (mark yourself from on a scale from 1 – 5, see question 3).*

Although the great majority felt guilty to some extent, the weight of the answers had slipped further towards the 'not guilty' end though there were hints of awareness in their comments that maybe they should feel more guilty than they do. Here are some comments which reflect this:

'Not very guilty or ashamed – except perhaps of not doing enough to change things, but I am not really in a position to. Classic get-out, of course. '

'Actually more angry than guilty or ashamed and wanting to blame my parents for not giving me a better attitude.'

'Regarding being a beneficiary, 3 (which I immediately feel guilty about writing; I think it is easier to be out of touch about noticing how white people benefit.)'

It is interesting that there seem to be two levels of responses which takes the reflection into a 'double loop' (see chapter 2). There is a response to the

question and then a reflection on that response – 'I don't feel very guilty.....maybe I should feel guilty about not feeling guilty'.

Purpose of guilt and shame

Question 6 asks: *If you do feel any shame or guilt do you think these form any purpose, useful or not?*

Of the thirteen who replied one had a quite neutral response in terms of whether or not shame or guilt were potentially useful as follows:

> I feel the shame might come from exposing to myself and you the feeling of racism that I feel I 'shouldn't have'. I guess this might be a primitive response to 'showing', which from a cultural point of view might be viewed as letting the side down and appearing weak in front of the enemy. The guilt might be a result of turning inward a feeling of (not sure what of? anger maybe? possibly hatred) of 'them' being different to me. I think this may also be a primitive response which may be a readiness to engage in combat/defend my family from attack from outsiders/generally be ready to defend.'

Of the others, 8 thought shame and guilt were useful. There were several helpful elaborations on this as follows:

> 'Yes, I think so. I have always thought of both feelings as a wake-up call'

> 'Guilt is useful as it encourages you to do something about it'

> 'Yes, for me they do as they make me question what has given rise to these feelings which in turn makes me question my beliefs, or make them conscious. Sometimes I'm guilty of lazy self-interest and do nothing further; other times I compensate almost in a condescending way by acknowledging a stranger because he/she is different from me in a way I know is often discriminated against...this one I definitely feel ashamed of, as I think it's stronger and more subtle / insidious than primary racism.'

'Yes, might help me not act like that. It is worse to feel shame but not act on it'

'I think they are essential feelings otherwise how would anything ever change?'

'It serves the purpose of heightening awareness and spurring to rebalancing action....'

'Guilt and shame might give us some idea about how and why we do things and whether we are fundamentally responsible.'

One thought guilt and shame were not useful:

'I think these feelings can have quite unhelpful consequences, such as making me feel angry and defensive.'

and 3 thought that there are useful and not useful aspects:

'Well, they could make me more receptive to social change that improved opportunities. On the other hand, guilt and shame can make one very resentful towards the cause of those feelings, and feed the original antipathy, so I am not sure whether these things cancel each other out.'

'I think both feelings could get in the way of making a relationship in the present, but they are important in staying aware of my potential racism.'

'Could be useful, could be not – depending on whether it translates into action and to what extent it is simply selfblame for being born white. I have experienced both these.'

Shame and guilt relating to national identity

Question 7 asked: *To what extent do you feel shame or guilt about racist manifestations that your own country perpetrated in the past such as the*

colonialisation of other countries? (mark yourself from on a scale from 1 – 5, see question 3).

One did not score herself but made the following comment:

> 'I feel less shame or guilt about this; as given my heritage, England doesn't feel like 'my' country (given that my ancestors weren't British).'

Of the people who scored 5, one was the black respondent. He said:

> 'I don't feel at all responsible as I am a member of a minority group whose country was colonised and still endures neocolonialisation.'

There were some interesting comments from others:

> 'Very ashamed – what the hell did we think we were doing? Lack of respect for indigenous cultures is cringe-making. So probably 1 on that. But I don't feel that much guilt, because it was done by others, who had a different set of values, without my consent (cf. modern Germany and Nazism). Where I do feel guilt is that we do not do enough now to repair the damage we did. We should be making more amends. '

> 'Having recently visited India for the first time I feel strongly about this ; the colonial wealth; the slaughter of thousands in the interest of commerce.....the third world trade issues /sweat shops. The person I was with felt that 'we' had done much to benefit the country ....infrastructure, education etc ...some of this also feels insidious as if the end justifies the means.....I also read Arundati Roy for the first time and she verbalized the depth of this kind of damage where a culture does not know itself enough due to suppression / oppression to claim its identity consciously.'

'Shame 1 guilt 1 because the legacy of the past still means that I benefit from colonialisation because of beneficial trade agreements etc I think the past is very much alive in the present.'

It feels to me that some of the most heartfelt responses were in answer to this question. However I wonder if two questions have been confused here. One is 'Should I feel guiity or ashamed about abuses perpetrated by my ancestors?' and the other is 'Do I benefit by the results of these abuses?' I will come back to this below.

Further comments

Question 8 asked for *further comments.* Six did comment further as follows:

'Guilt carries responsibility to do something about it but not shame as it would imply you want to hide this.'

'I think racism stems from fear, and the more people can be helped to understand others and empathise with them, the less fear and therefore the less racism we will have.'

'As I haven't aided endemic racism I don't feel guilty. Feel guilty as a member of society but not personally.'

'I think I hold different qualities of shame or guilt depending on how general or how particular the manifestation of racism is... for example, can feel intense shame over an incident where my action betrays a racist assumption, but less acute guilt over, say, the English colonial exploitation of Ireland/my ancestors in colonial Africa and India.'

'I feel appalled by what western culture has done to other cultures, but I don't feel it is helpful to judge myself harshly for being born into this culture and being affected by it. There was a time when I did do that, but now I feel that I want to extend compassionate understanding also to myself.'

'I did in the past feel terribly ashamed of Israel's actions towards Palestinians; in fact it came as rather a cathartic revelation when I identified this feeling. I expended much energy campaigning for Palestinian rights, and, clearly, there is a connection to be made here. Now I feel less identified with Israel, and have been able to separate out being Jewish from being a Zionist, and, whilst still having strong opinions about Palestine, am no longer driven in the same way by feelings of shame. And, I think it was more shame than guilt that was the motivator.'

Difficult and uncomfortable feelings about endemic racism are most evident in these further comments. Many people feel that they should not feel responsible for society's wrong-doings but have nagging feelings of shame or guilt nevertheless.

Discussion of questionnaire outcomes with reference to relevant literature and aspects of the group exploration

I am interested to see that, from the comments above, less shame and guilt seems to be felt about endemic racism than personal racism. It is very easy to feel helpless, uninvolved and not responsible for underlying cultural assumptions in our own society. Of course these are very hard to change as an individual but my own sense is that we are all contributors and help to maintain it if we do not try to become conscious of our assumptions and do something about them. The question remains whether or not shame and/or guilt – or guilt-shame - are useful in helping us respond well to this situation.

Altman (2000) suggests that our embeddedness within an institutionally racist society leads inevitably to unconscious racism in a white psychotherapist whilst dualistic thinking is in place and feels that the best we can do is to be reflexive with our clients. My position is that, through being alive to a sense of guilt about racist attitudes, we can tackle our own patterns of dualistic thinking and racist attitudes that result. That way we

can work towards a change in societal epistemology in the way that Bohm suggests (see chapter 2).

In thinking further about whether shame or guilt are useful, I come back to my realisation that in question 7 (regarding the racism perpetrated by our own country in the colonisation of others) that there were 2 different questions and some of my respondents had replied to one and some to the other. One question was: 'Should I feel guilty or ashamed about abuses perpetrated by my ancestors?' and the other: 'Do I benefit by the results of these abuses?' I think there is an important distinction here. The first question is often, in my experience, one that people object to in its suggestion that they should be held responsible. They ask, 'How could I be responsible for something that was done without my knowledge or consent?' One answer to this is the subject of the second question. We feel guilty because we are still benefiting. Some of these ways I show in chapter 4, including the 46 ways that McIntosh (1988 and appendix 2) found that she benefited by being white. We also benefit in many other ways including by protectionist trade agreements which benefit the west at the expense of the 'developing' world. The racism that is endemic in society is 'fed' by images and assumptions handed down to us by our colonial ancestors. Benjamin Zephaniah reflected on this when he turned down his OBE (Zephaniah 2003, 27th November). He says:

> 'I get angry when I hear that word 'empire'. It reminds me of slavery, it reminds me of thousands of years of brutality, it reminds me of how my foremothers were raped and my forefathers brutalised. It is because of this concept of empire that my British education led me to believe that the history of black people started with slavery and that we were born slaves, and should therefore be grateful that we were given freedom by our caring white masters. It is because of this idea of empire that black people like myself don't even know our true names or our true historical culture.'

He points out that the British establishment are still living off the spoils of empire and still using black people when it suits their 'image':

> 'I've never heard a holder of the OBE openly criticising the monarchy. They are officially friends, and that's what this cool Britania project is about. It gives OBEs to cool rock stars, successful businesswomen and blacks who would be militant in order to give the impression that it is inclusive.'

So what about acts perpetrated by our ancestors that do not apparently directly benefit us in the present? I concur with some of my co-researchers in feeling guilt or shame can prompt us to take responsibility for the actions of our ancestors and heal the wounds of the past. Wounds from the past are still felt by those who inherited them as can clearly be seen by Bejamin Zephania's comments. The black respondent to my questionnaire likewise expressed the pain of colonialisation and neocolonialisation. 'Unfinished business' will continue to cause conflict until it is acknowledged and amends are made.

Following the exploration above I have identified several stances my respondents take on racism prompted by feelings of shame and/or guilt:

1. I feel guilt/shame about my own personal racist feelings, responses and actions or inaction.
2. I feel guilt/shame about the way I benefit by racist policies which have been put into effect both currently and in the past
3. I feel guilt/shame about the institutional, endemic racism within society.
4. I feel guilt/shame about the racist actions that have been committed by my forefathers both in this country and in other countries.

My respondents in the questionnaire tended to feel guilty about all four but less acutely about them in descending order.

Although this makes sense to me in that one's own personal responsibility becomes less direct as we move from 1 to 4, I find myself to be more interested in and concerned about the last three. As I understand that the world is relational and that 'watertight' individuals do not exist (see chapter 1), I am becoming more interested in racism as a relational phenomena which comes out more in numbers 2 to 4. (See chapter 7). I therefore want to understand the place that guilt and shame may take within relational/societal setting where there has been some 'wrong-doing'.

Although I had not fully articulated this to myself at the time, this may be behind a dialogue that I had with a member of the White Co-operative Inquiry Group. I was concerned to show that I think that we do have responsibility for racism within society. This group member felt that even if we are responsible for abuses through colonlialisation we should not feel guilty or ashamed as in doing so we made as assumption that this guilt and shame were of 'some use or interest to non-white people.' He thought their primary function was to comfort ourselves. He went on to say that he thought that abuses that white people carried out in relation to black people were no different to the abuses that many groups carry out in relation to others such as Nazi over Jew and Protestant over Catholic. He was therefore not clear whether the issue was about whiteness and blackness or just about abuse of power. He therefore saw engaging in 'generalised shame' as a defense. He said he felt

> anxiety, disappointment and fear at the human tendency to split and project, but I don't relate these feelings only to issues of skin colour. I also feel sickness and horror when I think of such atrocities as slave trading, the ghettoising of native Americans by European settlers, apartheid in South Africa, the theft of aboriginal land in Australia, and any other abuses carried out on the basis of skin tone difference. But isn't skin tone just one of many convenient hooks to hang hatred on in the pursuit of tribal/ethnic/cultural dominance? Why aren't

we looking at all of these instead of using just skin colour as the demarcation line in our discussion? '

December 2002

At the time my reply on the email included the following:

> I would just like to say that I have never thought that being 'white' as a 'racial' identity has any thing really to do with skin colour any more than 'black' has. They are just signifiers[13].

I explained that the fact that these are signifiers is important as we are able to 'hook' our prejudice on to them and I felt it was appropriate to do so. I went on to say that I thought that

> both feelings [of guilt and shame] might alert us to something being amiss. If we rush to make ourselves feel better by asking someone to 'absolve' us we are just using them. It is interesting in my questionnaire how often people said they immediately want to feel better if they feel guilty. (Many also said that if they never felt guilty they would be inhuman or psychopathic.) I think there is a mature response to guilt and an immature one. The thing I think is missing from what you said is that we do live by the benefits of being 'white' and on the whole don't do a lot about it.

December 2002

I now feel that something was not fully grasped in this correspondence. Although abuses of power happen in other situations I think those carried out by white over black is of such a large scale and so endemic in society that it deserves special attention. Certainly the cycles of the co-researching process have led me to feel strengthened in my belief that only feeling 'anxiety, disappointment and fear' does not take into account our own

[13] The word 'signifier' is a sign of something other than itself and often holds meaning beyond the obvious. In this case 'black' and 'white' are not really the colour of skin at all, they just signal the meaning given to darker and lighter skin tones and is a short hand for all the complex ideas and feeling that surround the notion of 'race'.

culpability. At the end of the co-operative inquiry process this member of the group did agree with this point (see chapter 4). Psychotherapists often see one feeling as 'avoiding' another (eg we might feel anger to avoid sadness or sadness to avoid anger). In this correspondence a similar substitution was being suggested but were anxiety, disappointment and fear masking shame and guilt or vice versa?

This correspondence led to further discussion in the group. Eleanor described being 'wracked with guilt' about her relative good fortune when working with asylum seekers and refugees and this led to a discussion of whether women were more prone to feel guilty than men. Richard said that he did not think it was necessary to feel guilt in order to know that reparation was necessary and that feeling guilt was narcissistic. I said that I thought that guilt alerted you to knowing something was amiss and a reparation was needed. However I did become aware through the continuing dialogue with Richard of a danger in feeling guilty, particularly as guilt can put you at the centre of what has happened and can reveal a sense of omnipotence.

I felt challenged by this dialogue: how much is the feeling of guilt merely narcissistic as it puts ourselves and our feeling at the centre of the frame? Maybe a lot turns on how the guilt is held. If the guilt is seen as an end in itself it could be damaging in that we can expect others to absolve us, feel too debilitated to act or angry about being 'made' to feel that way, all of which could be seen in the reactions of respondents to my questionnaire.

As part of another cycle of reflection after the group I came to the conclusion that guilt-shame potentially has a range of negative implications and consequences:

- unconscious (or conscious) resentment to the subject of the guilt (as was mentioned in the questionnaire).
- depression leading to a difficulty in acting.
- making a show of one's guilt as something to be proud of.
- creating a subtle pressure on those about whom one feels guilty to absolve us.
- expecting the subject of our guilt to be interested in and pleased by our guilt.

I accept all of these as genuine difficulties in which guilt is used as an indirect form of communication which white people and, no doubt, myself, frequently engage in. I do not think, however, that these factors invalidate the place shame and guilt play in bringing to us an awareness of our racism and its being a spur to action.

If we have been shamed and made to feel guilty in painful ways as children then it is hard not to be overwhelmed with these feelings when an adult (Mollon 1993:43 - 45). We are then more likely to resent those about whom we feel guilty or fall into a depression. If guilt and shame are hard to bear because we were not as children helped to see how reparation mends and deepens relationships, then it is going to be harder to learn this as adults. Experiencing psychotherapy is one way that adults have of this kind of emotional learning, though the course of life's experiences, particularly of relationships, can bring this kind of learning in its wake as well.

Review of literature regarding guilt in white people concerning racism

To help explore this matter further I turn to various authors who threw light on my inquiry.

Tuckwell (2002) has some very useful thoughts in considering guilt and shame. She points to the importance of white people facing the feelings of guilt in order to relate fully to those who are black. This is a contrary view to

those in my questionnaire who thought that shame and guilt prevented them from relating to black people. Maybe the important point here is 'facing' the guilt rather than just feeling it, however. She talks of the double bind often experienced by white people who have not asked to be born white but nevertheless enjoy the privileges accorded white people in our society.

The subject of the guilt felt by white people about being white is more often explored in American publications. These include an edition of the *Journal of Counseling and Development on Racism, Healing its Effects* (1999) in which seventeen people of different 'races' give their story of finding a way through racism. The white people among them reiterate the guilt they feel at their privilege. One of these says:

> The process of acknowledging what was meant by 'us', of owning my own racial heritage, included owning all the history that goes with being White. During this process, the only part of that history I could see was its shame: slavery and genocide of Africans, American Indians, Asians, and Mexicans. There didn't seem to be any horror that wasn't committed in the name of the 'manifest destiny' and superiority of European Whites. My reaction was to feel an incredible amount of guilt and shame; I didn't want to be White, didn't want to belong to this group, didn't want to be part of this 'us'. (Brandyberry 1999:8)

Brandyberry's story shows succinctly how painful the full realisation of the implications of white privilege is and how it involves feelings of guilt and shame.

As a backdrop for illuminating and exploring white privilege, McIntosh (1988:see appendix 2) writes that she found a list of 46

> 'special terms and conditions I experience that I did not earn but that I have been made to feel are mine by birth, by citizenship, and by virtue of being a

> conscientious law-abiding 'normal' person of good will. I have chosen those conditions that I think in my case attach somewhat more to skin-color privilege than to class, religion, ethnic status, or geographical location though these other privileging factors are intricately intertwined.'

It is a sobering list of day-to-day circumstances like 'I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.' and 'I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.' It is interesting that McIntosh does not specifically mention feeling guilty or ashamed of this but it does seem to be implied. The overt message of her paper is not 'you ought to be ashamed of yourself', as it very specifically talks about each circumstance as benefiting herself. The message is nevertheless very challenging to others with white skin as they obviously benefit by the same advantages. It seems to me to point to shame as McIntosh owns her own culpability. For me it brings the accusation closer to home because McIntosh is prepared to take responsibility herself for the situation. She does not say 'white people are people are privileged in this way' she says 'I have noticed that I, as a white person, am privileged in this way'.

These sentiments are echoed by Marilyn Frye in her paper On Being White.

> 'My being on the white side of racism leaves me a different variety of options than are available to a woman of color.....It becomes clearer why no decision I make here can fail to be an exercise of race privilege.' (Frye 1987)

And her question is:

> 'Does being white make it impossible for me to be a good person?'

This clearly implies a sense of shame and guilt.

Jacobs (2000) gives a heartfelt account of feeling guilty in her paper *For Whites Only* in which she says:

> 'Probably better known to most of us than our race-based anxieties is our race-based guilt. Many of us feel guilty about the history of slavery and inequality that is so inherently contradictory to our democratic aspirations. The ugly and self-defeating combination of anxiety, guilt, shame and ignorance makes it all but impossible for even the most minor of cross-race interactions to proceed with the natural grace that is common in white-white interactions. That is partly why this paper, as I write, is so graceless. I am strongly aware that a graceful paper would be a lie, of sorts, a sanitized and careful tiptoe through a highly charged, incredibly complex and tangled emotional landscape. My guilt is part of what fuels my passion to try to set things right.'

Jacobs is here showing that guilt provides her with the motivation to fully understand what is amiss and the energy to make amends.

In the light of my inquiry I ask myself the question, can shame and guilt in any way play a useful role in society? Could guilt and shame, in relation to white people's racism, make a useful contribution in curbing destructive behaviour and attitudes? Maybe an ability to experience guilt and shame can contribute to a sense of group cohesion and group forming.

Hellinger (Hellinger and Hovel 1999) points to this in his notion of 'conscience'. He uses this to signify that which binds group members together. What he calls 'conscience' ensures that we behave well within the boundaries of the groups to which we belong. Those beyond the boundary of our own groups can be seen as 'fair game'. Racism might flourish if, without a 'willingness to assume guilt', we ensure social cohesion in our own group by making others 'bad'. So, in order to see beyond our own group, we have to go beyond conscience. He says:

'Each group develops an internal conscience that encourages everything that will serve their group and damage others. The most horrible things are done to members of another group with a perfectly clear conscience.' (Hellinger and Hovel 1999)

He is pointing here to the way in which societal groups form according to specific criteria for inclusion and exclusion.

He emphasises the beneficial role of guilt:

'Without a willingness to assume guilt, one is incapable of action. Those who try to remain innocent remain weak, and in their attempts to avoid guilt, they bring additional suffering to others.' (Hellinger and Hovel 1999)

Dalal (2002) comes to similar conclusions and relates these specifically to the therapeutic encounter. As a group analyst who follows Foulkes and Anthony (1957:46), he has an understanding of what is called the 'social unconscious'. He sees the socio-historic as 'embedded at the deepest levels of the unconscious.'(Dalal 2002:217). He writes specifically about the way 'races' are formed as a way of 'colour coding' in-groups and out-groups. He points out that the socio-historic aspects of the relationship between blacks and whites are often unconscious and therefore denied. When it comes to therapy the therapist is often 'avoiding something that is painful and unresolved in them involving countertransference.' He suggests that our reason for avoiding these feelings is because of our sense of guilt. He says:

'By virtue of his colour the white, given other things as equal, does have it easier than the black in this society. To face this is to face guilt and the pain of that. If this area has not been addressed in the therapist's own therapy then it lies within – too hot to handle and so will be unconsciously avoided. The white therapist in this scenario is avoiding remembering that he or she does occupy a

more privileged position than the black patient.' (Dalal 2002:218)

This is further confirmed by the white psychotherapist, Robert Altman (2003:105) who says:

> 'White racial unawareness is a function of white guilt for having oppressed black people through particular actions or through collusion. To the extent that we are unwilling or unable to bear the pain of guilt, we do not want to know about what we have done individually or in the collective as white people. We have a vested interest in being unaware of what we have done, and thus who we are.'

We can see then that guilt (or shame) is useful if it draws our attention to our culpability but not if we are 'unwilling or unable to bear the pain' of that guilt.

Conclusion

As a result of my complex exploration through questionnaires, interviews, group exploration with co-researchers and a literature search, I feel strengthened in my belief that it is fruitful for guilt to be faced or 'remembered' (Bollas 1992:216). My stance at the beginning was very similar to that of Hobson (1985:134): a sense of shame and guilt will bring us back, as it were, to our 'better nature'. I could see that we need to develop a strong and flexible sense of self which can 'take' the narcissistic knock of understanding the harm we have done to others. A strong sense of self enables us to feel this pain of the guilt, gives us the ability to 'stay with' it, reflect on what it means to those harmed and the humility to own our culpability. Where a sense of self is fragile the pain is too much to bear and is likely to result in an attacking response to those who 'make' us feel guilty. Paradoxically, the more basic self-esteem we have, the more able we are to usefully respond to guilt. Without it we may either deny our guilt or be compulsively guilty which can lead to unproductive hand-wringing or a desire to be prematurely absolved.

These aspects of how individuals respond to guilt-shame do not take into account that we all exist within a social and intersubjective context, so shame and guilt have to be seen in this light also. As human beings we tend to split into groups and define ourselves by feeling that those within our boundaries are 'like us' and those without are 'unlike us', or 'me' and 'not me' in Winnicottian terms (1958:215). Because of this Altman regards racism as inevitable and irredeemable (Altman 2000). If his approach is taken fully on board it would suggest that we may 'forgive' ourselves our racist attitudes because they are inevitable but 'use' them within therapy by seeing the therapy relationship as a mirror of society. I agree with Altman that we are inevitably part of our societal context, caught in 'black and white thinking'. We can use the racist attitudes we 'catch' within ourselves to inform our work with non 'whites'. But beyond that, I think it is possible to transcend this dualistic way of thinking and the racist attitudes that result by applying focused awareness to those issues and allowing our feelings of guilt and shame to alert us to the complex dynamics of anger and guilt underlying intercultural encounters. Attempts to transcend dualism contribute to a shift in this epistemology as is suggested by Bohm (Bohm 1996:see chapter 2).

As Hellinger (1999) says, terrible crimes are committed more easily against those outside our own group. In today's world with fast communication and ease of movement around the globe it becomes more and more important that we own our complete humanity and recognise and repair the harm we do. At the same time we cannot expect those whom we have harmed to forgive us, particularly as individuals. In the intersubjectivist's perspective, we are not individuals at all but part of a larger system and inevitably take part in it. In the West institutional racism is endemic and as whites we are inevitably complicit: it seems to me that the forty-six advantages to being

white that McIntosh (McIntosh 1988) found are as true today as they were fifteen years ago.

Working with groups or cultures to make a difference is a difficult undertaking. The question I therefore need to ask here is: can the mobilisation of group shame and guilt be useful in changing consciousness about the dangerous and destructive nature of western power?

An American peace-worker pointed out that widespread feelings of shame following ill treatment of prisoners in Abu Ghraib have changed American opinion about the war in Iraq and may well influence events (Amidon 2004). Sadly, those in charge try to characterise the situation as a few bad people behaving in an 'un-American' way thus attempting to maintain the split of 'us, good/them, bad'. If the American people (and others) reject this splitting I think there is good reason for optimism as their sense of shame may lead to a preparedness to reflect and eventually to make amends.

My inquiry into guilt and shame has shown me that dialogue across cultures is important but not sufficient if power differences are not taken into account. Dialogue needs not only lead to a sense of 'interest' in the difference, we need also to own the culpability that white people have in assuming a privileged position and how this inflicts harm on black people. However, an empathic engagement, in which the reality of the advantages white people have is faced, is likely to lead to a sense of guilt and shame (or, possibly, guilt-shame) thus sharpening awareness and willingness to change in encounters. This process is hard to stay with and may lead to demoralisation or denial. It can also lead to something much more generative; a sense of acceptance and embodied engagement resulting in reparation and clear-sighted political action.

My inquiry has led me to believe that guilt and shame can play a positive

role in working towards resolving the power imbalance between 'white' and 'black' people in life and within the psychotherapy encounter.

This concludes the section of this thesis in which I have explored what it is to be 'white' within a racialised context. In the next part of this thesis these themes are picked up and explored further in my work as a psychotherapist and within psychotherapy organisations.

PART THREE

BEING A WHITE PSYCHOTHERAPIST

CHAPTER SIX

PSYCHOTHERAPY WITHIN A WHITE HEGEMONY

The air must be altered
The underground must be understood
For the overground to be different
From *Mental Fight* by Ben Okri

Introduction

I show in this chapter how my work as a psychotherapist is embedded within the white, western world. I bring with me the attitudes and assumptions of that world and also the insights I have gained in my research. In chapter 3, as well as the other chapters in Section 2, I explored what it is to be a white person including my personhood as a white psychotherapist. The emphasis so far has been on my *identity* as a white person whilst this chapter focuses more on my *practice* as a white psychotherapist. I therefore discuss my practice and in particular, my work with non-white, non-western clients – people who are not embedded within the white western culture in the way that I am. I show how my learning about myself as a white person/psychotherapist has influenced the work I do in this field and critically evaluate, not only my own work, but that of psychotherapy undertaken by white psychotherapists within a society in which many races and cultures are part. This exploration includes the political context in which the psychotherapy takes place.

Before looking at this in more detail I will outline some of the influences that have shaped my work as a psychotherapist as it has a bearing on how I work within a diverse society. I will start with my development prior to the time when I began to think about myself in a racial sense. I go on to explore

how the philosophical basis of my work changed over time so that I have come to see psychotherapy as intersubjective in nature. I regard intersubjective psychotherapy as congruent with action research as well as helpful for working across a racially and culturally diverse society. I finally propose an intersubjective approach to working across difference in 'race' and culture, since I believe it provides the best framework for accommodating a diversity of clients.

When considering psychotherapy as a profession, and to put my own work in context, it is helpful first to understand the main schools of thought as they have different theoretical bases with widely different ways of understanding the world. These schools of psychtherapy can be divided into three broad catagores (Clarkson and Pokorny 1994):

- the *psychoanalytic,* based on Freud's theories of the unconscious mind,
- the *behavioural,* based on Pavlov's theories of conditioning and
- the *humanistic/existential,* based on, among others, Maslow's theory of self-actualisation (Maslow 1972:40 - 68).

All of these theories are based within the white, western tradition and none has made much allowance for working within culturally diverse field.

My own original training was rooted in the humanistic tradition and later incorporated and integrated psychoanalytic ideas, particularly those of the object relations school as I will explain below. The integration of these ideas has led me to regard psychotherapy as an inquiry – an intersubjective inquiry. As we will see below, because of its non dogmatic nature, this approach can facilitate work across difference in culture, particularly as it requires us to search our own assumptions. Of course we can never stand back entirely from these but the more we are able to question and stop

taking our own outlook on life for granted, the more we are able to understand our own perspective and how it differs from others. An intersubjective psychotherapist *takes into account* that they are biased and therefore likely to be blind to these differences. Below I explore this in more depth I describe the journey I took in order to reach the position I now espouse. In short this journey is two fold.

1. One is my journey towards taking an intersubjective approach to psychotherapy and the
2. other the journey towards better understanding working across cultural difference.

The two are linked as I go on to develop an intersubjective approach to work across difference. The first part of my journey as a psychotherapist was taken before I understood my work within a diverse society and, as I recount this journey, I show how a lack of awareness of a racialised environment affected my work.

Becoming a psychotherapist

My journey towards becoming an intersubjective psychotherapist is therefore important to my thesis as it also reveals part of the journey of coming to understand myself as embedded within the white, western culture.

I had no consciousness when I started on this journey that psychotherapy was a 'white' institution. In the first place, becoming a psychotherapist arose both out of a deep sense of inadequacy and a growing sense of my own creative ability. However, I came to realise only very gradually that to be a psychotherapist I need to speak from, be grounded in, my own woundedness and to allow the creativity that springs from that place to come through (Hawkins and Shohet 2000:192). My interest in working across cultures is nevertheless based on this sense of woundedness in two ways. Firstly, I have

experienced the pain of living out of my original culture, as I explain below, and secondly I am willing to experience my own woundedness through a sense of guilt and shame about being white. Through my experience I understand the relevance and benefit of being open to such wounds.

Within the box below is a story of how I became a psychotherapist. This story is a reflection of my approach to psychotherapy and how I take my being white into account in my work. I offer it here as background to my approach to this work.

Becoming a Psychotherapist

In my family I was known as the 'helpful' one. My sister was 'academic'. It was part of my identity to be helpful rather than clever as if it were not possible to be both. Any praise I received was for being 'patient' and 'understanding' so these qualities seemed to be ones I could rely on. I had no feeling that they really described me. They just seemed to be something I was good at and earned me praise. I longed to be considered clever or even nasty. Years later I remember skipping down Baker Street with a great lightness of heart because the leader of a Group Analytic group had called me ruthless. Over many years of my own therapy I have got to know myself, to discover myself, more fully. I have found that being patient is not something that comes easily - I often feel immensely impatient - but that I am quite naturally empathic so that it comes easily to me to understand how someone else is feeling. I also find that I am always interested to know as accurately as possible what people around me are experiencing. Whilst this is no doubt a great asset as a psychotherapist, I first developed this facility as a young child. I seemed to take it on myself to provide an empathic presence in my family.

So does the quality 'empathic' describe me, Judy Ryde. Is this a quality *I have* or is it something that I *acquired* through responding to the needs of

my family? I have come to see this, partly as another paradox and partly as a dilemma that only makes sense if we understand the nature of the 'self' to be a 'thing', a reification that only means something from an essentialist point of view; a point of view which understands the 'self' to 'have' an 'essence'. From an existential and constructivist point of view we can also understand the 'self' to be a process rather than something fixed and immutable (Bateson 1982:288). The idea that I might 'be' empathic becomes an idea I can hold lightly.

So, to return to my history, I became an occupational therapist because I wanted to 'help' people and because I didn't go to university but wanted a profession. But why did I become a psychotherapist? Half the training of an occupational therapist is to work with mental illness, the other half with disability. I found that I was much more interested in psychology and psychiatry than anatomy and medicine. In the practical training in hospitals I much preferred the very human contact with psychiatric patients to deciding what would provide the right kind of activity for a patient with restricted movement. With psychiatric patients I could develop my creativity. The more spontaneous and alive I was with the patients the more I was praised for my work and the more I enjoyed it. There was nothing exact or 'scientific' about it. As a student and also when I was a newly qualified therapist I most enjoyed organising drama productions and concerts, painting and dancing with the patients. In those days the psychiatrists I worked with believed that mental illness was a physical phenomenon. Patients were given drugs and electric shock treatment. In the minds of the psychiatrists my job was to keep patients from being bored but also to be able to report on their state of mind. But what I *enjoyed* was the human contact even though it could be harrowing at times. I met people who had had miserable and broken lives, who had suffered appalling trauma and losses, who had committed terrible acts of harm to themselves and others, whose behaviour was self destructive and bizarre.

As I worked in the poorest parts of London, most of them also had to cope with living in terrible poverty having come from different cultures and classes to myself. Maybe it was here that I first learnt to love working with people who were 'different' to myself although I think there was also an identification with being a person who was different.

I came from a background where it was considered polite to conceal pain so this was an education in reality. Along with the reality of the pain that was all too evident, there came an honesty that I had not encountered before. Their experiences had put them past pretending. This honesty also applied to the enjoyment of good things. I have memories of jumping up and down with excitement with a group of patients when a play we put on was a success and falling about laughing about the absurdities of life.

I felt instinctively that what mattered in psychiatric occupational therapy was the contact between OT (occupational therapist) and patient. So when, at the age of 25, I became head OT of a small psychiatric hospital in East London I immediately brought an end to the way occupational therapy was structured in the hospital. I did this completely ruthlessly with what seems to me now to be indecent and insensitive haste. Maybe it was through the luck of youth that it worked well and I managed to carry most of the staff with me. It was certainly not through thinking through the implications. The new arrangement was that OTs would not be attached to certain activities but to wards. This meant that each OT was responsible for a particular group of patients, thus making the relationship with the patients more important than the particular activity they were engaged in. It also meant they became part of the staff team of the ward and worked closely within it.

This hospital was predominantly staffed by people who took a more psychodynamic approach to mental illness than I had encountered elsewhere and for a period of some years it functioned like a therapeutic

community (Hinshelwood and Manning 1979). Great emphasis was placed on staff support and learning. We spent almost as much time learning with each other as we did with patients and I thought that, as a result, patient care was of a high standard. We all valued the experience and expertise of each other and there were plenty of opportunities to share and reflect on our skills. Here I learnt not only to laugh and cry with the patients but also with the staff. I took the opportunity to run a 'group analytic' group under expert supervision and was paid to attend a course with my co-therapist at the Institute for Group Analysis.

Then I heard about drama therapy. I went to visit a hospital in Oxford where they had developed the use of drama therapy with patients. What I saw was so inspiring that I knew immediately that my day with them had become an important life-changing event. My colleagues and I attended courses away from the hospital and arranged courses in-house. These were not only in drama therapy but also in other types of creative therapy. We turned the department into a creative therapy department and the activities we did had a more specifically psychotherapeutic intent. Our work was encouraged and appreciated by colleagues who were not part of our department. It was an immensely creative time and I feel privileged to have been there.

My journey to becoming a psychotherapist had begun. During and after this time I continued with training and, on leaving the hospital, started working with individuals and groups. I also went into therapy myself. Some years later I was able to put a portfolio together to become qualified as a psychotherapist and group therapist through the Association of Humanistic Psychology Practitioners.

In 1984 I became involved with the start of a psychotherapy and counselling training organisation in Bath with my husband and other colleagues. I am

now the only remaining original staff member working at the Centre. For the last twenty years the development of this centre, the Bath Centre for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BCPC) has been central to my life and more than just a job. I have been deeply engaged in developing it as a healthy and democratic institution with human values and with the development of a body of theory that underpins its work. Now I am less centrally involved and it continues to develop without me in control. The tenet that theory is always developing in relation to practice and experience is so deeply held within the culture that no doubt development will continue beyond my ability to keep up! I get immense satisfaction from this. None of this development has been easy. There have been real failures, betrayals, misunderstandings, childishness, adolescent behaviour and bad mistakes along the way. On balance we have learnt by these. We have known that it is best to learn by mistakes and this knowledge has always helped to take us forward.

Development of my own theory for my practice as a psychotherapist

My first contact with psychotherapy theory was psychoanalytic as the psychotherapist that I worked with was a psychoanalyst and group analyst[14]. My first training experience was in group analysis and psychoanalytic ideas were ones which were discussed more generally in the hospital. Although this work was carried out in a very multicultural area of London and many of the patients were from ethnic minorities, no account was taken of their differences or any explicit attempt made to understand their view of life. Psychoanalytic ideas are thoroughly based in western thought but presumed to be universal in their application (Lago and Thompson 1996:79). In spite of the diversity in the patient group generally

[14] Group analysis is a group method based on psychoanalytic ideas, particularly those of Foulkes (1964)

within the hospital the patients who attended group analytic sessions were white without exception. At the time this fact did not strike me. I simply gave it no thought although I was politically active on the 'left' and worked for Amnesty International and Anti Apartheid.

At a later stage humanistic ideas were also introduced, partly through another psychotherapist employed by the hospital who had done some Gestalt[15] training and partly because the psychoanalyst attended an 'encounter group' (a humanistic group method) and went through a short-lived conversion. My experience of creative therapies predisposed me to humanistic theory. Humanistic psychotherapies involve experiential methods and I was encouraged to go in that direction by the psychoanalyst with whom I worked He suggested that, being an occupational therapist, I did not need to be constrained by the mainstream to continue my career! This sense of being not in the 'mainstream' or of being one down within a hierarchy (also found in my experience at boarding school where I was of a 'lower' class than my school mates), has been an important influence on me and is, no doubt, important in what led me to work with different cultures where others experience being 'one down'. Although the groups I ran at the time that were influenced by humanistic thinking did include those from 'minority ethnic' groups, these patients tended to be those who had been brought up in the west.

The advice of the psychiatrist to train in humanistic psychotherapy and my response to it has echoed down the years since it was made. I first fell on it with alacrity and only later reflected on what I felt to be its implication that I was second best in some way and could get away with second rate theory! These interactions demonstrate a cultural difference between psychiatrists and occupational therapists and psychoanalytic and humanistic psychotherapists in which power differences are perceived. I now think his

[15] Gestalt therapy is a type of humanistic psychotherapy founded by Fritz Perls.

suggestion encouraged me in a direction that has much more creative flexibility about it and much more rigour than I was giving it credit for at that time. Now I understand that this body of theory is compatible with action research with is grounded in humanistic psychotherapy (Reason and Rowan 1981:xvi; Reason and Bradbury 2001:3; Rowan 2001:121).

It is accepted within most schools of psychotherapy that undergoing one's own therapy is a vital part of the training. In this context my first two therapies (1975 and 1977) were humanistic and I became caught up in the humanistic world, attending many groups and courses and running them myself. I valued the encouragement of risk taking, emotional expression and honest relating. Later I came to feel that there were gaps in humanistic theory that needed attention. There was no well understood or described developmental theory underpinning it at that time, which is now being provided by intersubjectivity theory in its concepts of 'organising principles' (see below). It seemed to me that this sometimes meant that clients were colluded with or challenged when they were, for developmental reasons, not able to make use of the challenge. It is possible to attend to clients' needs more carefully if we understand how they have developed in the way that they have[16]. Humanistic culture in the 1970s was based within the white, western world and did not, on the whole, reach out beyond these boundaries. In these years it did not occur to me to question this orthodoxy.

It was not on these grounds that I later questioned the humanistic approach. My criticism was more about a lack of interest in developmental needs. Reflecting on clients' responses in supervision, I came to see that clients need a reliable, bounded space that provides the safety to open up

[16] I would now understand this in terms of the development of 'organising principles' (Stolorow R.D. and Atwood G. E. 1984) rather than a development into an autonomous human being as this suggests a view of the self that is unitary and not intersubjective.

so self exploration becomes possible. When the time and place was not reliable I noticed that my clients tended to become closed and defensive and it seemed to me that they often found an excuse to leave. For these reasons I began to study psychoanalytic ideas and went into analytic therapy and supervision. Inevitably there was a certain amount of introjection and idealisation of these theories at first, no doubt also influenced by the psychiatrist's comments that encouraged me into humanistic psychotherapy in the first place.

Following this stage I became interested in developing theory which transcended the dichotomy between the two approaches.

As I have shown, all through this development of my theory I did not reflect on the lack of attention to diversity within the profession or within my practice. This perspective was brought to my notice at a general meeting of psychotherapy's umbrella body – U. K. Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP). A delegate to this meeting made an announcement that he would like to initiate an intercultural committee to advise the council on these matters. He had been discussing this possibility with a well known writer about intercultural psychotherapy called Jaffa Kareem (Kareem and Littlewood 1992). Sadly Kareem had recently died but he wished to go ahead with this partly to honour Kareem's legacy. This announcement resulted in a sudden realisation for me that I had been ignoring this area ever since I started practicing. This was the first time I was aware of feeling guilty and ashamed of myself as a white person. In some ways this thesis has its roots in this moment. I joined the committee and stayed a member for about ten years, three of which I was in the chair.

A changing philosophical basis for my understanding of psychotherapy

The subsequent development of my theory took on board both strands I mentioned above - interest in cultural difference and the development of my

understanding of intersubjectivity. I began to read about intercultural therapy (which I describe in more detail below) and realised that my theory was based on my own assumptions without examining those assumptions or taking on board that others may well have different beliefs. My development towards an intersubjective approach is outlined below and I explore this before I look more specifically at my growing understanding of my place within a racialised environment.

Through discussions and shared reading with colleagues from BCPC, we found that, by holding humanistic and psychoanalytic ideas together in dialogue, a new way of understanding psychotherapy that transcends some of the old dichotomies began to emerge. This new thinking involved a change of epistemology which challenged the way psychotherapists have understood, not only the nature of the 'self', but how experience is understood (Bateson 1972; Wilber 1996:142). This is the same epistemology that underlies that of a participative worldview (Reason and Bradbury 2001:6) which also informs action research. From this point of view, the 'self' is no longer a separate 'thing' which has discrete boundaries. It exists in relationship and can only be described within a context. This challenged notions from both humanistic and psychoanalytic psychotherapies which tend to understand difficulties as residing *within* individuals, and people as having discreet internal worlds that have been *caused by* their life experiences.

This way of understanding the nature of 'self" is similar to the African idea of *ubuntu* which can be translated as *I am because you are* (see also chapter 2), a frame that describes a less individualistic cultural assumption than is found in the white, western world.

In his chapter in the Handbook of Action Research, Rowan (2001:120) says that humanistic thought is fundamentally based on an idea that there is a

'real self'. He goes on to say that, if this idea is to be challenged, then it is not possible to honour the fundamental tenet of humanistic psychology that human beings are authentic, autonomous and self-actualising. In my view we do not have to understand the 'self' as *either* a unitary structure in which all indwelling and potentially meaningful experience 'belong' to a discreet, bounded, individual *or* the self to be fragmented and meaningless *or* just one possible discourse within a narrative context (Shotter 1993:4). If instead we understand ourselves to be embedded in a co-created, participative universe which 'does not consist of separate things but of relationships which we co-author' (Reason and Bradbury 2001:6) then authenticity, autonomy and self-actualisation remain meaningful and exist within a web of relating rather than being situated within an individual. This 'web' allows for differences amongst individuals and groups and is consistent with non-white approaches such as the African notion of *ubuntu* (see above) and the non-individualistic way of understanding the world found in native American culture (Sue and Sue 1990:177).

In finding our way along a path to this conclusion we discovered both humanistic and psychoanalytic theorists who have developed ideas along the same lines and are now in dialogue with each other, though this thinking is far from being incorporated into the mainstream of either psychotherapeutic approach. These are Gestalt psychotherapists who have developed 'dialogic' ideas such as Hycner and Jacobs and the Intersubjectivists from Institute of Contemporary Psychoanalysis in Los Angeles such as Stolorow, Atwood, Orange, Brandschaft and Jacobs. I will explore both further below.

Intersubjectivists

I will now discuss the idea of intersubjectivity in psychotherapy in some depth as it has a bearing on how I understand my work as a white psychotherapist who works across difference in culture. The

Intersubjectivisits regard contemporary western society as suffering from an epistemological mistake – that of believing in the 'Myth of the Separate Mind' (Stolorow and Atwood 1992). They view the self as only existing within a co-created relational context and

> 'psychoanalysis as the dialogic attempt of two people together to understand one person's organisation of emotional experience by making sense together of their intersubjectively configured experience' (Orange, Atwood et al. 1997).'

The Intersubjectivisits are psychoanalytic phenomenologists who base their theoretical formulations in the hermeneutic tradition and existential philosophy (Atwood and Stolorow 1984). They understand the therapeutic relationship to be 'focused on the interplay between the differently organised subjective worlds of the observer and observed' (Atwood and Stolorow 1984:41). Some years later they clarify their meaning of the term by juxtaposing it with Stern's description of the developmental process, relating their own formulations to Kohut's theory of narcissism (Kohut 1977).

> 'We wish to emphasize here that our use of the term 'intersubjective' has never presupposed the attainment of the symbolic thought, of a concept of oneself as subject or of intersubjective relatedness in Stern's (1985) sense. Although the word 'intersubjective' has been used before by developmental psychologists, we were unfamiliar with this prior usage when we (Stolorow 1978) first coined the term independently and assigned it a particular meaning within our evolving framework. Unlike the developmentalists, we use the term 'intersubjective' to refer to any psychological field formed by interacting worlds of experience, at whatever developmental level these worlds may be organised.....An intersubjective field is a system of reciprocal mutual influence (Beebe, Jaffe et al. 1992). Not only does the patient turn to the analyst for selfobject[17]

[17] The term selfobject was coined by the self psychologist, Heinz Kohut, to describe the function of taking in the object (other) to support and enhance a sense of self. Good selfobject

experiences, but the analyst also turns to the patient for such experiences.' (Stolorow and Atwood 1992:3)

Stolorow sees Stern and other developmentalists as regarding intersubjective relating as a developmental achievement (Stern 1985:133). Although Stolorow was not aware of Stern's work, Stern does refer to Stolorow thus:

'There have as yet been no systematic attempts to consider the sense of self as a developmental organizing principle, although some speculations in that direction have been made [amongst others he cites a paper by Stolorow et al (1983)]. And it is not yet clear how compatible the present developmental view will be with the tenets of self psychology as a clinical theory for adults.' (Stern 1985:26)

As the thinking of the intersubjectivists of the Institute of Contemporary Psychoanalysis is so central to my own position as a psychotherapist, I need to distinguish, where possible, their use of the word 'intersubjective' from that of other psychotherapists and psychoanalysts as this is becoming used more frequently with slightly different definitions. It is particularly important as this approach has a bearing on my stance as a white psychotherapist working across difference in culture. Stolorow et al understand intersubjectivity to be an ontological state – a universal 'given' rather than a developmental achievement. Recently Stolorow et al have been explicit about their philosophy in these terms. They make it clear that they position themselves as phenomenologists counter to traditional psychoanalysis:

'The assumptions of traditional psychoanalysis have been pervaded by the Cartesian doctrine of the isolated mind. This doctrine bifurcates the subjective

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relationships are thought to be necessary for healthy development of a sense of self in infants.

word of the person into outer and inner regions, reifies and absolutizes the resulting separation between the two, and pictures the mind as an objective entity that takes its place among other objects, a 'thinking thing', that has an inside with contents and looks out on an external world from which it is essentially estranged.' (Stolorow 2002:1)

This understanding implies an epistemology which relies on what Reason and Bradbury (2002) call a participative world view in which all in the human (and more-than-human) world exist within a web of co-created relationship. Atwood and Stolorow also say that they understand child development within this frame:

'every phase in a child's development is best conceptualised in terms of the unique, continuously changing psychological field constituted by the intersection of the child's evolving subjective universe with those of caretakers' (Atwood and Stolorow 1984:69).

I have nevertheless no difficulty in accepting both their and Stern's use of the word intersubjective. I accept that it is a 'myth' that we have a 'separate mind' (Stolorow and Atwood 1992:7) and that fundamentally there is no separation between subjective worlds. Nevertheless for each individual there is a 'unity of locus' (Stern 1985:82) or a 'differently organised subjectivity' (Atwood and Stolorow 1984:65). When we become sufficiently aware of the intersubjective nature of the world we can know that we relate as two subjects and this is a developmental achievement. We become aware of a state of affairs that already exists. Stern says that a 'quantum leap' in the sense of self occurs when:

'The infant discovers that he or she has a mind and that other people have minds as well. Between the seventh and ninth month of life, infants gradually come upon the momentous realization that inner subjective experiences, the

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Kohut (1984).

> subject matter of the mind, are potentially shareable with someone else.' (Stern 1985:124)

Maybe it is a matter of semantics but here Stern says that the child becomes aware that others 'have minds' which, to Stolorow et al, is reifying the mind. Nevertheless, maybe Stern comes near to the meaning of intersubjectivity used by Stolorow if the meeting of the two minds referred to above are imagined to be within a field of intersubjectivity. His meaning does seem to be accepted by Atwood and Stolorow where they quote Stern's research but put his description of what he calls the 'sense of subjective self' in the context of an intersubjective field' (Atwood and Stolorow 1993:188).

There are similar difficulties in the use of the word intersubjectivity used by contemporary members of the independent school of psychoanalysis such as Christopher Bollas, Thomas Ogden and Stephen Mitchell. They seem to me to mean, when using the word intersubjective, a meeting of two subjectivities rather than two 'differently organised' subjectivities within an intersubjective field. I think that when Bollas talks of a 'dialectical intersubjectivity' (1992:188) this is implied.

Stolorow et al take issue with Thomas Odgen's use of the term 'intersubjective' by saying that he:

> 'seems to equate intersubjectivity with what for us is only one of its dimensions, a domain of shared experience that is prereflective and largely bodily, what we call *unconscious nonverbal affective communication'.* (Stolorow 2002:85 italics in original)

They go on to say that intersubjectivity has for them:

> 'A meaning that is much more general and inclusive, referring to the relational contexts in which all experience, at whatever developmental level, linguistic or prelinguistic, shared or solitary, takes form (Stolorow and Atwood 1992). For us, an intersubjective field – any system constituted by interacting experiential worlds – is neither a mode of experiencing nor a sharing of experience. It is the contextual precondition for having any experience at all.' (Stolorow 2002:85)

Stephen Mitchell seems to come closer to the ideas of Stolorow et al and is acknowledged by Stolorow et al as 'highly compatible' (Stolorow 2002:78). He bases his understanding on the work of Hans Loewald who suggests that we begin

> 'with experience in which there is no differentiation between inside and outside, self and other, actuality and fantasy, past and present.' (Mitchell 2000:4)

Rather than see this state of affairs as regressive, as earlier psychoanalytic writers have done, understanding the child to be 'merged' with the mother and eventually 'differentiating' to become 'unit selves' (Guntrip 1971:124; Winnicott 1988:8), Mitchell shows how Loewald sees us as slowly over the years learning to operate

> 'a parallel mode of organizing experience that accompanies and coexists with experience generated by the original primal unity'. (Mitchell 2000:4)

In other words there is no philosophically tenable differentiation but we have to live as if there were. Furthermore he revisions Freudian theory as shifting the 'locus of experience' from the individual to the 'field'. He says that 'in the beginning' is not the 'impulse' but 'the field in which all individuals are embedded'. This seems to me to go a long way towards Stolorow et al's position though not all the way. Individuals still 'exist' rather than being understood as 'differently organised subjectivities' in a unified field.

However Mitchell does say that

> 'no human mind can arise sui generis and sustain itself totally independent of other minds' but that 'individual minds arise out of and through the internalization of interpersonal fields, and that having emerged in that fashion, individual minds develop what systems theorists call emergent properties and motives of their own.' (Mitchell 2000:57)

Out of these theories Mitchell suggests four modes for 'housing and comparing different perspectices on, and accounts of, relationality' (Mitchell 2000). There is a hierarchy in these 'modes' of an increasing ability to relate authentically. They are: Nonreflective behaviour, affective permeability, self-other configurations and 'intersubjectivity' (2000:64). This hierachy suggests intersubjective relating as an achievement.

These are very fine but important distinctions. The context in which all these authors are writing is in re-thinking object relations/self psychology but the Intersubjectivist School start from phenomenlogical philosophy and therefore from first principles where all assumptions can be challenged, even that we 'have' a mind at all. If we understand the mind in the Batesonian sense, as I think Stolorow et al do, as something we partake in rather than 'have' (Bateson 1982:458), then it is easier for us to approach others without prior assumptions. We are then interested in what happens between us as 'differently organised subjectivities'. It is this point that is particularly important to take into account when working in a diverse society as these 'subjectivities' arise from the specific field conditions of different cultures or experiences within society, such as the experience of being black in a white society.

My experience is that an intersubjective stance is helpful when working in a diverse society, but this has not been discussed specifically by intersubjectivists. Only Jacobs, who is a member of the intersubjecivist

school and a dialogic gestalt therapist (see below), has written about being white as a psychotherapist (Jacobs 2000: and see chapter three).

Dialogic Gestalt therapists

As I indicated above the intersubjectivists' view is closely allied to Dialogic Gestalt Therapy which came to a similar view independently. They have also been an influence on me. The intersubjective perspective opens naturally from Gestalt psychotherapy because of its espousal of field theory (Lewin 1935; Lewin 1952:42). Clarkson and Mackewn describe the 'field' as:

> 'all the coexisting, mutually independent factors of a person and his environment.....All aspects of the person and of his field are interrelated, thus forming a whole or a system' (Clarkson and Mackewn 1993:42).

and Yontef says:

> 'The field is a whole in which the parts are in immediate relationship and responsive to each other and no part is uninfluenced by what goes on elsewhere in the field'. (Yontef 1993)

Dialogic Gestalt therapists, such as Hycner and Jacobs built on field theory and the philosophy of Martin Buber (1958). In *The Healing Relationship in Gestalt Theory: a Dialogic/Intersubjective Approach* (Hycner and Jacobs 1995) in which one of the authors (Richard Hycner) says:

> 'At the heart of this approach is the belief that the ultimate basis of our existence is relational or dialogic in natures: we are all threads in an interhuman fabric.' (Hycner and Jacobs 1995:6)

The dialogic Gestalt approach seems to me to differ from the intersubjectivists, not so much in their theory, as in their approach to theory.

The intersubjectivists take a well reasoned, philosophically argued approach that builds on and takes issue with other writers from the psychoanalytic field. Their writing has a rather 'dry' feel. The dialogic theorists build on and relate to other Gestalt and field theorists and on the philosophy of Martin Buber, as well as, to some extent, the intersubjectivists. Their writing, in contrast, has a heartfelt quality but does not always examine assumptions. These characteristics are evident in the following passage:

> 'It is the genuine honoring of experience that allows the individual to overcome resistances, and to be 'bodied forth', and therefore to extend his/her experiential 'envelope'. It is being present to that which has not been allowed to see the light of day. It is a reverence for this person's *unique* experience. It is a hallowing of this moment. It is teaching the client to stay within his/her experience, rather than getting caught up in an image, or shoulds – in a false self. It is helping the client to live at the experiential edge – which is the meeting point person-with-person.' (Hycner and Jacobs 1995:19)

Hycner[18] does not say how he knows what he asserts here, maybe expecting the reader to 'feel' the truth of it for themselves. In fact he uses a 'feeling', poetic and evocative language such as 'bodied forth', 'hallowing of this moment' and 'live at the experiential edge'. Hycner is apparently more critical of the Intersubjectivists than Jacobs. In fact one of the chapters in the book is a critique of the Intersubjectivists' work. He says that they fail to 'recognize what seems to be an inherent human need to meet and to be met.' (p200) Although I think this is implied in the centrality of the Intersubjectivists' notion of 'sustained empathic inquiry' (Stolorow and Atwood 1992:93), there is some difference here. His description of 'meeting' the other in the interhuman realm has maybe more feeling of genuine

[18] Hycner is the author of this particular chapter. The book written by Hycner and Jacobs, The Healing Relationship in Gestalt Therapy, is not an edited book but each chapter is written by one author or the other rather than both together.

mutuality in the psychotherapeutic encounter. However, the following passage seems to me to be something of travesty of a description of the intersubjectivists approach:

> 'There is so much emphasis on the self in intersubjectivity theory that one ends up 'aiming' at one's own self, almost in disregard of, and without responsibility for, one's interconnectedness with others. The other becomes merely an 'object' to be used in the pursuit of one's own self. The other, as a unique and distinct person becomes obscured in ones' own self-unfolding.' (Hycner and Jacobs 1995:202)

As I have shown above, it seems to me that both Intersubjectivists and dialogic Gestalt psychotherapists see the self as existing *within* relationship and the therapeutic endeavour being about understanding what arises in that meeting. This understanding is not a merely intellectual exercise but is grounded in allowing deeper and deeper awareness of subjective experience.

A split seems to have occurred between the humanistic and the psychoanalytic that can be characterised as a 'head/heart' split; the intersubjectivists being more obviously 'academic' which can lead to rather a 'dry' style of writing and the humanistic, Gestalt therapists being less rigorous but more heartfelt in their language. It is also characteristic of this split that dialogic Gestalt therapy is not mentioned by the Intersubjectivists but they are well discussed and even integrated into the humanistically oriented book by Hycner and Jacobs. This split is very familiar to me. Many humanistic writers acknowledge and integrate psychoanalytic (Rogers 1965; Rowan 1976; Clarkson 1995) ideas but I have virtually never seen this in reverse, even when the subject matter is new to the psychoanalytic writers but has been discussed for many years by humanistic authors. For instance, Rogers (1958) wrote of the importance of empathy long before this was taken up by self psychologists (Kohut 1971) but he is not mentioned by them at all. Self

psychologists did, however, use empathy in a characteristically different way. They use it in order to learn more about the patient whereas Rogers used it for a therapeutic purpose. Furthermore those who become 'integrative' psychotherapists tend to originate in a humanistic 'school' (Kahn 1991; Clarkson 1995; Scott 2004). Within the professional hierarchy psychoanalysis is generally acknowledged to be 'higher' just as white people are 'higher' in a black/white hierarchy. It is interesting that black people tend to integrate white, western ideas more often than happens *vice versa*.

The split between the psychoanalytic and humanistic perspectives, particularly in the way it perpetuates a head/heart split is not something that I, and others at BCPC, have wanted to continue. Rather than come down on one side of this split, we have wanted to take a position in which both are given due weight. We build our theories on our experience and value base and are helped in our explorations by various authors regardless of the 'school' to which they belong. We consciously espouse diversity in our theoretical approach, especially when it illuminates the work in hand.

Reflections on these approaches that have led to my own position
Given these influences, I have come to see psychotherapy as a disciplined but free-floating exploration of 'being with' that which arises in the space between therapist and client. I consider this inquiring way of working to be more suitable in working within a diverse society as there is an attempt to examine prior assumptions and there is an openness to understand others' assumptions, thereby creating a broader base for understanding different and similar experience.

I regard what arises between myself and my client as coming from or originating in an intersubjective field to which we both contribute. I listen both to the client and to my own responses in a way which brings the term 'evenly suspended attention' to mind (Freud 1912). I become interested in,

and inquiring into, that which arises in this space. In this way the issues that do arise are not reduced to 'problems' found in the client which have nothing to do with my also being present. Clients, after all, experience their lives in a relational context and my experience with them more often than not seems to be similar to that experienced by other people in their lives. This could be said to be an intersubjective way of understanding what psychotherapists call a 'transference' relationship.[19] Donna Orange recognised the similarity but difference in this way of understanding the transference relationship by coining the word 'cotransference' (Orange 1997:63).

At the same time, my hope is that the client has an experience of being related to and engaged with deeply and authentically. I have found, as have the dialogic Gestaltists, that it is in this meeting that changes take place that are 'healing' or transformative. Gaining insight into patterns of behaviour which take place outside the therapeutic relationship may be instructive but rarely make much difference to the client. For example, a client and I discovered between us that she felt painfully ignored by parents, who were more interested in each other than in her. She tended to be very self-sufficient and cut herself off from relationships. I found it hard to 'find' her and often had difficulty even remembering what she had previously told me. We seemed to be caught in mutual 'ignoring' that I, too, found difficult because I am deeply familiar with this experience in my own childhood. When I was able to bring this out in the open between us she became more open about her thoughts and experiences and at the same time she seemed to be able to experience a closer and potentially healing relationship with me.

[19] Classically this is one in which the client 'transfers' feelings and attitudes originally experienced in relating to original care-givers, usually the parents, to the psychotherapist R. D. Hinshelwood (1989)

This example shows how my conception of the intersubjective allows me to think about what arises between myself and a client in a way which is significant both in terms of understanding her and to facilitate a therapeutic 'moment' where she feels heard and understood. Maybe this is where the 'air' has 'been altered' as:

'The underground must be understood
For the overground to be different'
(Okri 1999:see heading of chapter)

Psychotherapy with the racialised environment of a diverse society

Having shown how I approach my work as an intersubjective psychotherapist, and started to explore its relevance to work in a diverse society, I will turn to my work specifically across cultures where my being white is brought into relief. Before going into the detail of that I will explore the political context of psychotherapy as it shows something of the field in which I practice in regard to race and culture.

In order to honour the reality of the cultural and racialised context in which we work, I have found that it is particularly necessary to talk explicitly about societal and political issues with clients from 'black' and 'minority ethnic' groups as these issues often impinge greatly on their lives. Indeed, these issues are often explicitly brought out by clients from black and minority ethnic groups in a way that other clients do not. These clients nearly always talk about the way government policies affect them both in this country and their country of origin and make political statements themselves. I find that they are also much more likely to talk about their religious views and practices, compared to western clients.

One example that spans all of these is that of a gay, Muslim, African client who is extremely distressed about having lost his family, country and

religion, all of which are of the utmost importance to him, because of his homosexuality. He impresses on me the circumstances that have led him to experience these losses. Having gained refugee status in this country he became more acutely aware of his sense of loss and led to him feeling more rather than less depressed. Having this loss received and understood and the pain of it borne by another brings some relief and the possibility of re-finding a fulfilling life (Fox 2002:103).

Understanding clients' difficulties as purely internal, personal manifestations can be reductive and disrespectful. This attitude ignores the emotional effect of the failure to recognise racism and often, in the case of refugees and asylum seekers, extreme persecution and trauma caused by political decisions and actions both in Britain and in their country of origin (Dalal 2002:76; Tuckwell 2002). The traditional practice of Muslim women being put to death because they are felt to bring shame to a family when they transgress normally accepted gender specific behaviour, was brought up by a Muslim client of mine. This is a poignant situation in which personal, political and cultural factors come together.

Samuels (1993:209) carried out a survey to find out how much talk of political and social issues did go on in the privacy of the psychotherapy consulting room. His survey shows that internationally a significant number of psychotherapists who answered his questionnaire (56%) said that they did 'discuss politics' with their patients/clients. This does of course leave 44% for whom these issues are never even discussed. Of those who do, he showed that 71% concentrated on intrapsychic, symbolic meanings and 36% on wider meaning for the client. This data was not collected as part of a piece of empirical research but more as a survey (Samuels 1993) and was not meant to give more than some kind of indication of the situation (Samuels 1997). However, in its own terms, it only shows that a small percentage of psychotherapists do explore the meaning of a cultural context

with their clients without reducing it to personal symbolism. As Samuels says, psychotherapists are often taught that clients who talk of non-personal matters such as politics are avoiding internal distress, and thus ignore a part of their lives which is highly significant.

Provision of psychotherapy for non white, western clients

When cultures were typically more separate from each other, as populations were less mobile and there was less immigration and migration within countries, it was more likely that each culture would have its own way of responding to emotional distress which 'fitted' with its own cultural climate. Less individualistic cultures such as African, Asian and Native American (Lago and Thompson 1996:90; Maiello 1999), often use very powerful rituals which help the sufferer into a more harmonious place within their community.

But those of 'mixed race' or those who live in the west but whose parents or grandparents came from non-western cultures do not have access to traditional approaches (Littlewood 1992:8). They are obliged to use services that are available to them here whether they like it or not. But how useful are western approaches to people who are not embedded in its culture? Is psychotherapy just another way in which whiteness is 'performed' (Frankenberg 1999; Gilbert 2005) on 'black' people?

No doubt this is the case even if psychotherapy is 'adapted' for intercultural work. I do not believe, however, that the answer is to stop doing psychotherapy with anyone but white people. It is much more complex an issue than that. Various authors have asserted that culturally sensitive counselling and psychotherapy is needed and feel strongly that equality of access to these services is deeply important for the well-being of all communities (Sue and Sue 1990; Kareem and Littlewood 1992; Lago and Thompson 1996). It is important to understand, though, that white, western

approaches to mental and emotional distress are not the only valid ones and that different cultural methods of healing can be integrated as part of a more unified field of psychotherapy.

I have had an African Muslim client who wanted her son, who had been diagnosed by an English psychiatrist as schizophrenic, to take part in an Islamic ritual, which I know in a Sufi context as *zikr*[20]. She felt that this would provide the healing he needed and, having taken part in *zikr* myself, I could appreciate what she meant by this. In spite of psychotherapy being unknown in her culture she seemed well motivated to come and see me. I felt we made a significant connection, partly because I understood and validated her experience, not only by making a leap of imagination, but also by having personally experienced something she would not expect a westerner to experience.

There is a point of view among counsellors and psychotherapists that clients of any particular culture should ideally see a therapist from their own cultural background in order that they are understood from this standpoint. I have seen little reference to this in the literature which discusses psychotherapy and cultural difference although staff of Nafsiyat, an intercultural therapy centre, do allow clients to choose their therapist but do not say what kinds of choices are usually made (Kareem 1992:16). Nafsiyat does not recommend that therapists stick solely to their own cultural group as it 'diminishes the human element' (Kareem 1992:23). Maybe having a culturally similar psychotherapist could lead to ducking a more pressing need to address societal issues which impinge on the psychotherapy relationship where there is a difference in culture.

[20] Zikr is a Sufi form of group meditation which incorporates rhythmic movement and speaking together the names of Allah.

Akinsete, (2002) whose research explored why black men typically do not take up counselling, found that the black men he interviewed would only be prepared to see a counsellors who was black if they saw one at all[21]. However, most authors who write in the area of culture and psychotherapy, tend to focus on encouraging sensitisation to cultural difference (Sue and Sue 1990; Lago and Thompson 1996).

Whilst I think it is good policy to have the facility of a diverse group of psychotherapists available to meet need for black people to see black therapists wherever possible, I consider it, as a catch all solution, to be problematic on three counts:

- if cultural matching is thought of as a complete solution it may not seem as necessary to try to ensure inter-cultural sensitivity in the training and on-going development of psychotherapists;
- in our society any individual's cultural mix is hard to match, often making it difficult to carry out even when services follow such a policy (both parties are not white, for instance);
- psychotherapy itself is a western phenomenon so, to some extent, the psychotherapist has been enculturated in western attitudes thus ensuring that cultural matching may not, in itself, guard against prejudiced views[22].

Furthermore, psychotherapy is not homogeneous; there are many different theoretical orientations and 'schools' of psychotherapy and some may 'fit' better with different cultures. In fact different psychotherapy 'schools' grow up and flourish according to the cultural values of the times or to fit within a

[21] I am nevertheless very aware, as someone who used to be Director of a counselling service, that most black people do ask to see a counsellor who is black.
[22] I had a psychotherapy supervisee who, when seeing clients from her own culture, wanted them to reject traditional values in the same way that she had done. The dialogue between herself and her clients and herself and me as supervisor, not only led to a change in her practice, but helped her to move on in the way she understood her relationship to her culture of origin.

particular culture or sub-culture. Culture is not a static phenomenon but is always changing and subcultures can develop within the main culture. I am thinking here not just of 'ethnic' cultures but also other groups which assert a difference such as gay people or even groups which claim a counter-culture such as 'hippies', 'travellers' etc. For instance, some psychotherapy methods are body-orientated. For some cultures a stress on bodily experience could feel right or at least not shocking, whilst for others it could be considered immodest or be in some other way counter-cultural. Similarly, some psychotherapy methods actively encourage the overt expression of emotion. I have shown elsewhere (Ryde 1997) how some cultures value the expression of emotion whilst others do not.

In the light of these considerations, I do not advocate that people from any or all cultures would or should find psychotherapy acceptable. I do, however, think that it should be openly available to all comers and sensitive to people of any or all cultures should they want to engage in it. This sensitivity may have something to contribute to inter-cultural understanding (Ryde 1997), as psychotherapy has a methodology which encourages a non-judgmental and inquiring dialogue. My experience in working with refugees and asylum seekers shows that those who come from non-individualistic cultures (I would consider from what I have been told by these clients that this is true of most I have so far worked with) welcome a chance to explore their experiences and value a relationship in which this inquiry becomes possible. My own approach, as I have explained above, is inquiring and does not reduce all to personal pathology, which helps me to find a 'meeting place' with such clients.

I have several Muslim clients from various parts of the world - including Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia - who describe their cultures to me as ones where the family and 'tribe' are very 'close' so that dishonour to the family implies dishonour to the self. Conflicts within the

family must not therefore be shown to strangers and to do so dishonours the family. Normally, speaking to a psychotherapist would be unthinkable. Nevertheless, I find that clients who have no supports or few family members in England, particularly as they come in extreme distress, will often be prepared to explore their difficulties in psychotherapy. Even when families are together the extended family will probably not be present and that, with the enormous pressures on family members to cope with trauma and loss, makes usual ways of getting through difficult states of mind unavailable. Their desperate need seems to lead them to understand that not having anyone to talk to increases a sense of isolation and interferes with their ability to cope with life in England. I have the sense that they also think 'this is how things are done round here' and are more prepared to do things differently than they would at home, particularly in private and in the context of professional help.

A black colleague has pointed out that in her country, Guyana, people would, and sometimes still do, use 'family courts' to help work out difficult problems and tensions (Benjamin 2001). In her view, since immigration has led to the break up of families, counselling is something that could potentially take its place and is much needed, both for those who now live abroad and those in Guyana. If a Guyanese person who lived in a different country sought counselling, they would need to see someone who was sensitive to the impact that culture and cultural difference have on her new life experience.

I have also come across the use of 'family courts' from the account of a client who comes from a Muslim country who told me that the way she had rebelled against custom would have led to her being put to death by her family were she still at home. This is a complex situation to respond to as a psychotherapist in a culturally sensitive way as the client is herself rebelling against established custom in her own country. I am shocked and horrified

by what she is telling me about a very culturally different attitude to women to the extent of having them killed. This demonstrates that a straight forwardly prescribed psychotherapeutic response is not sufficient as any particular individual responds differently to culturally imperatives. I also found this person's story a challenging situation to deal with in my countertransference[23] as I was outraged on her behalf. To me she had not 'sinned' at all, having only dressed in western style and related to fellow students at a college without a chaperone. She had also courageously worked for women's rights when in her own country. My comfortable, white, liberal view of tolerance of 'other cultures' is severely challenged and troubled by this situation.

The Impact of Power Differences on the Psychotherapeutic Relationship

We can see then that differences of 'race' or culture have significant ramifications for the psychotherapy relationship. As I have shown above, this is partly because difference in culture leads to difference in basic assumptions about life. On top of these differences, there is an often unspoken power difference in the relationship between people from white, western and non-western backgrounds. In psychotherapy this power difference is compounded if the therapist is white and the client is black or non-western. (Lago and Thompson 1996:16 - 27; Ryde 1997; Ryde 2000). The white therapist may be considered by the client, and, indeed by herself and society at large, as the one who is mentally healthy and who defines what 'mental health' is, as well as having the power to be 'helpful' (Sue and Sue 1990).

[23] I use this word in the way it has come to be meant which is the feelings and responses that I discover in myself in relation to my client. Originally so called because it was understood as 'counter' to the client's relationship to the psychotherapist which is called the 'transference'. It was understood that the client transferred feelings to the psychotherapist from those experienced with early care-givers. The psychotherapist's 'unanalysed' responses were therefore known as the 'countertransference'. Theorising since the coining of the word 'countertransference' has taken the whole notion much further but the words remain.

Hofstede (1980) quoted in Lago and Thompson (1996:45) discusses how different cultures regard small and large power distance. Power distance concerns how power is distributed within the culture. In some cultures rigid hierachies of power are accepted as desirable whilst others prefer relatively flattened hierachies. This means that the power relationship between psychotherapist and client may have a particular meaning which may not be understood between them (Thomas 1992:136; Ryde 2000). For instance a western therapist may consider a client to be unusually submissive when, from the client's point of view, it would be unthinkably impolite not to give way to the opinion of a professional.

Although, as I have shown, various authors have written about psychotherapy and cultural difference, (Sue and Sue 1990; Kareem and Littlewood 1992; Adams 1996; Lago and Thompson 1996; Papadopoulos and Bung-Hall 1997; Jacobs 2000; Dalal 2002; Tuckwell 2002) as we saw above, psychotherapy *theory* as such does not often address cultural difference. Freud and Jung regarded their theories as holding true across cultures though Jung famously thought that black people had not reached the same stage of evolution (Kareem 1992:10). He regarded western civilisation to be a veneer that over-lays the 'primitive' which can still be seen in the cultures of, for example, Africans and Native Americans (McLynn 1996).

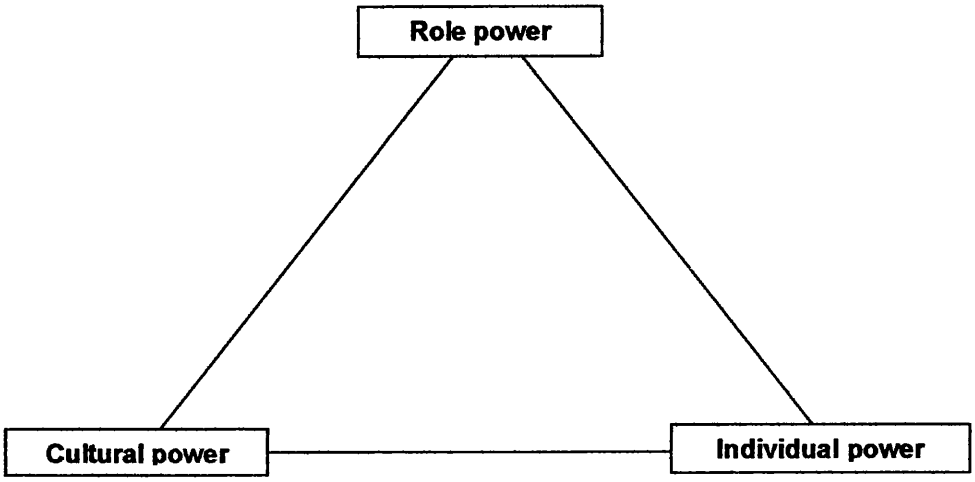
Humanistic theorists have been much more liberal in their view than Freud and Jung but on the whole do not consider the question at all. In fact I have shown elsewhere (Ryde 1997; Ryde 2000) that psychotherapy has itself a culture which is embedded in and, to some extent, is a response to white, western culture. As white, western culture predominates economically, politically and culturally we tend as white people to see our own standpoint as the base line from which others deviate (see chapter 3).

The role of supervision in helping to understand differences in power in the psychotherapeutic relationship

If the power imbalance implicit between those whose cultural roots are in the white western world and those who are not of this predominant global culture is to be addressed, it needs to be acknowledged and responded to within the therapy. As we have seen above (chapter 3), psychotherapists are helped to be thoughtful and reflective, rather than reactive, by regular consultation with a supervisor. Being in supervision is the more-or-less universal ethical practice of psychotherapists. It provides a place for reflection on all aspects of practice including on the power dynamics. It is important therefore that supervisors understand the way in which power differences may affect both the therapeutic and the supervision relationship.

Brown and Bourne (1996) have addressed this by exploring what happens in the supervision triad when there are cultural differences in at least one of the parties. They point out (Brown and Bourne 1996:39) all the different possible combinations that can arise when someone from a minority group is in each of the possible roles and the complex power dynamics that result. They particularly point to race and gender, though other factors such as sexual orientation, disability and class also have inbuilt power imbalance. Inskipp and Proctor (1995) have also pointed to the dynamics in relationships between black and white in a series of eight triangles showing all the possible combinations of supervisor, client and counsellor with each being black or white. Each triangle has its own dynamic which is influenced by the different power dynamics when the 'race' of each role is changed.

To draw this out further I have devised another triangle: one which demonstrates the complex power dynamics inevitably present in cross cultural supervision. At each corner there are three different types of power: role power, cultural power and individual power thus:



Role power identifies the power inherent in the role of supervisor and *cultural power* to the power of the dominant ethnic grouping, usually someone who was born within the white, western majority. This power is emphasised if that person is male, middle class, heterosexual and able-bodied. *Individual power* points to the particular power of the individual's personality which may be over and above that given to the person through role or culture. When all three different sources of power are brought together in the same person (ie in the supervisor) the effect may be quite overwhelming.

Cultural and/or individual power are not necessarily exclusively the province of the supervisor. When they are, the power dynamics may be simpler but could well be insensitively misused or even overlooked as they could be taken for granted. When cultural and/or individual power does not lie with the supervisor there may be conflict in establishing authority or a need to compensate by over emphasising it (Ryde 2000).

These issues are also relevant to the dyad of the psychotherapy relationship. Whatever the case, power relationships in the psychotherapy and the supervision are better explored than ignored as the following example of Susie Orbach's work (Orbach 1999:120) shows. She

demonstrates much skill and sensitivity in her work with a black client where this intricacy is drawn out and explored. She makes the following point:

> 'Racism is such a ubiquitous aspect of western life that neither of us [herself or her black client] had a hope of escaping it. How much was my caring for him, my *respect* for him, my holding my distance from him as he had requested, a function of my own racism? How much had I pussy-footed around the intimacy issue and gone along with his ridicule of my interest in raising our relationship because of my racism? Had I treated him as special and different and 'made allowances', rather than seen him as an equal who could engage with and challenge my argument?.....But even if we could not advance the situation much further, our articulation of it brought us closer, it unfroze what had happened within the therapeutic frame and Edgar felt that the feelings between us began to fill an emotional hole that had haunted him for thirty-five years.'

As this shows, articulation of a dilemma is often more important than solving it. Often the dilemma cannot be solved but the client appreciates the recognition and acknowledgement of it.

The following example from my own practice shows the subtle interplay of power dynamics in a psychotherapy relationship where the client's personal power has been enhanced by a dramatically difficult life. The client's dilemma is that she questions and is angry about both western culture *and* her own. Both seem to her to be responsible for endemic global violence and abuse. On top of that she has lost family (both through being rejected by some for her rejection of Islam and by physical distance from other family members) and has experienced extreme physical hardship through privation, danger and illness. Her asylum claim has been left hanging for more than two years.

Often she seems angry with me for misunderstanding her. I find that responding adequately to her is extremely complex and challenging if I am

not to reduce the political to the personal or the personal to the political. There is a fierce logic to her cutting analysis of western cultures and her own that leaves me wanting to cheer her on. At times like that I feel a sense of sisterhood with her which I suspect is somewhat self indulgent as my life has not given me the same challenges as has hers. Then her, sometimes angry, rejection of my attempts to come alongside her are often quite painful and hard to understand. I am aware of feelings of guilt about how she has been treated in this country and also because I am putting myself up as someone who can help her when my experience of life is so different to hers. I wonder if I am disavowing my own power here and not meeting her in hers.

In standing back from this and in discussing this in supervision, I wonder if I have, through my embeddedness in western culture completely misunderstood her. Have I trodden on something sensitive that she has to angrily disavow? Sometimes I withdraw, partly to lick my wounds but also to give myself time to think about what she has said. Sometimes I stay with the inquiry and I begin to see, often quite dimly, that she is referring to an area of experience that is outside my own, and it seems to me that this leads to my missing an important nuance of her experience. Other times *she* sees what *I* mean and we meet in an acknowledged moment of understanding. This is an example of the intersubjective nature of the work where what arises between us is misunderstanding and I bring her attention to this. Rather than dig ourselves further and further into feeling misunderstood we can appreciate something about the pain of being misunderstood in both of us and sometimes meet in these moments of understanding.

This is an example of the complexity of the work where nothing can be taken for granted and all assumptions need to be examined continually. A further example, in another session, I said that I thought her integrity was

important to her. At the time that I said this I thought it was self-evident and supportive. She angrily showed me that she has no choice but to act with integrity when she can. My words were inadequate to meet her situation where she feels she has no choice but to act as she does. I began to see that the idea of having personal integrity is a very western notion. It implies a choice made as an individual. This client insists on her personal power within the sessions. I sometimes wonder if her insistence would not be so great if the role and cultural power did not lie with me. It seems to *me*, in trying to identify with her, that the pain of apparently being outside and rejecting both cultures is a hard road for her and maybe untenable in the end. On the other hand the client herself insists that 'culture' is not a factor for her: her individuality transcends it. (This is in contrast to another client from a Muslim country who, in spite of acting against his culture in acknowledging to himself that he is gay, tells me that his culture is fundamental for his sense of himself.) This work is an on-going exploration and both of us are committed to it. If nothing else I am there to hear her anger and her pain and I try to stay thoughtful in the face of it all.

If we accept that psychotherapy is an inquiry which can approach the difficulties in understanding each other that are described here, I feel somewhat more confident that it can work reasonably successfully with power differences across cultures, just as action research is often found to be[24]. Bravette Gordon, for instance has shown that the inquiring nature of action research can be empowering to black researchers (Bravette Gordon 2001:321)

[24] Bravette Gordon, for instance has shown that the inquiring nature of action research can be empowering to black researchers Bravette Gordon, G. (2001). Towards Bicultural Competance. Handbook of Action Research. P. Reason and H. Bradbury. London, California, New Delhi, Sage.

Intersubjectivity and psychotherapy within a diverse, racialised environment

So how do intersubjectivity theory and psychotherapy which is set within a racialised, diverse environment converge? As I have shown above, my starting point is not so much to try to understand other people's culture but to understand my own within my political and social context including my racial identity as a white person. From there I open a dialogue which is set within the racialised environment in which we find ourselves. For me, a therapeutic encounter is a meeting within an intersubjective field of two *differently organised* subjectivities (Atwood and Stolorow 1984:65). Because of that, we need to take into account our own 'organising principles' (Atwood and Stolorow 1984:36) which are formed within our own cultural context when we attempt to meet our clients. Orange, Atwood and Stolorow (1997:38) suggest that we need to:

> 'strive.....in [our] self reflective efforts [for] awareness of our own personal organising principles – including those enshrined in [our] theories- and of how these principles are unconsciously shaping [our] understandings and interpretations.'

I have found that when I do not reflect on myself in this way, my clients are likely to feel that I am not present for them. Sometimes they tell me this, but more often I sense it in their withdrawal. If I do sense this I might ask them if they experience it too, if I feel that our relationship is ready for this sort of exploration. This is particularly important as I have found in my work as a psychotherapist, and through being in psychotherapy myself, that it is not being *immediately* understood that matters but the *genuine and sustained desire* to try to understand on the part of the therapist that is so vitally important. (Orange 1997:129) Casement is referring to something of this nature when he says that it is important as a psychoanalyst to 'survive, but only just' (Casement 1990:88). He is referring to the attacks that clients

make on us when they feel us to misunderstand them and the importance, not only of surviving these attacks, but of *only just* surviving. If we survive easily we will not have really experienced the attack and understood its ferocity. Stolorow et al, in referring to the importance of a 'sustained empathic inquiry', (Stolorow and Atwood 1992:93; Stolorow, Atwood et al. 1994:45; Orange 1997) also demonstrate the importance of showing a sustained desire to understand. Orange (1997) who has devoted a book to this subject, says something which I find useful in relation to the work with my client, above:

> 'Misunderstanding often seems to be the normal state of the psychoanalytic triad – the two subjectivities and the intersubjective field that includes them. If some fundamental emotional safety exists, however, analyst and patient together can attain understanding by continually working through in a fallibilistic spirit, the small and the large misunderstandings.' (Orange 1997:158)

I have indeed found that more often than not, both parties deepen their understanding of the meaning of the client's experience and of the process between them through ongoing inquiry. So how does this happen, particularly when an impasse is reached where no understanding seems possible? A willingness on the part of the therapist to stay with the pain of this process whilst maintaining an inquiring attitude is of the utmost importance. Although this is true of any psychotherapeutic relationship, it is even more true when there is a difference in culture as the difference is complex.

I have found this to be the case for myself as a client and, although I cannot substantiate this because of the difficulties of involving clients directly in my research mentioned in chapter 2, my sense is that this holds true for my own clients particularly for those who are asylum seekers even though it is clear that I am not able to do anything material to help them with their extremely distressing situation. They all seem to value an opportunity to tell

their story to someone who is at pains to understand what they are saying in as subtle and complex a way as possible whilst clearly remaining a whole human being with their own perspective. The difference in language and culture means that I often do not understand at first but my obviously genuine desire to understand correctly seems to make the difference.

Listening in this way is not always easy even with good intention. Stolorow and Atwood (1992;103) explore this by pointing to the way intersubjective conjunctions and disjunctions occur in the therapy. Intersubjective conjunctions refer to a situation in which the organising principles of the therapist and the client are closely aligned and disjunctions to the way in which they are dissimilar. Both may lead to difficulties in the therapy as conjunctions may lead to collusion with the client and disjunctions may lead to a lack of attunement. An intersubjective psychotherapist looks out for these phenomena both in their reflection on the work and in supervision. Stolorow and Atwood say:

> 'Whether these intersubjective situations facilitate or obstruct the progress of the therapy depends in large part on the extent of the therapist's ability to become reflectively aware of the organizing principles of their own subjective world.' (Stolorow and Atwood 1992:103)

Crucially, it is the recognition of these conjunctions and disjunctions and the way in which they are understood within the therapy that makes the difference. I have found myself, both in my own experience of therapy and with my clients, that owning to a lack of attunement on the part of the therapist can feel deeply significant to the client and helps to move the therapy on. These are particularly useful concepts when working across cultures as the organising principles of the therapist are likely to be very different to those of the client, leading to serious lack of attunement. The acknowledgement of this when it happens can make all the difference

although the process is rarely straight forward. In the example of the middle-eastern client above, the client often rejects my attempts to show an understanding of her but does seem to appreciate that I try to understand what is not correct about it. She affirms that the sessions are an important part of her week and has only missed once, in spite of being quite seriously ill. Thinking through our time together after the session and its reworking in supervision help me to 'stay with' the difficult and painful material. Having a supervisor who understands these complexities and shares an understanding of how to approach them is important too.

As we can see, the whole psychotherapy enterprise of one individual trying to understand the experience of another and of the process between them may be inappropriate for some people, an attitude which could be derived from their cultural standpoint. I think it is important to respect this point of view.[25]

Conclusion

Understanding the racialised environment in which we live as well as the different cultural assumptions that come part and parcel with this, is vitally important within the therapeutic encounter. Unless we are aware of the impact of this racialised environment and cultural difference, we make our own assumptions and think that we are able to understand others based on *those* assumptions. Maiello (1999) shows this very clearly in her paper documenting an account of a conversation with an African healer. In it she struggles to understand the basis of the healer's approach which, it seems to her, is built on an understanding of the power of the ancestors and involves very little verbal communication with the 'client'. She makes some attempt to understand the process in her own terms and to describe her

[25] I have found that there has been an unfortunate tendency within the psychotherapy community to pathologise people with whom there is a disagreement (Sue and Sue 1990). This is certainly true of responses to people who do not wish to engage in psychotherapy for whatever reason.

own work in the healer's terms. However, when the healer suggests that they exchange medicines – a herbal remedy for a 'word' – Maiello is at a loss. There is a sense in the paper of respect but of mystification. She points out that there is a psychoanalytical anthropology but not an anthropological psychoanalysis and concludes:

> 'The first step that can be made towards finding an answer to the question of the depth at which cultural factors influence the intersubjective and intrapsychic dimension of mental life is the openness to the intercultural exploration and debate.' (Maiello 1999:237)

As a psychotherapist and supervisor of psychotherapists I am constantly amazed at how complex the intricacies of relationships are when they are thoroughly explored and reflected upon in psychotherapy. Cultural differences are always present in some guise, however small. Where the differences involve race and culture, the complexities and the sensitivities are even more subtle and multifaceted. Developing an ability to stay open to the painful and confusing feelings that arise in these situations whilst being willing to articulate something about them is useful. This ability to 'stay open' is learnt by psychotherapists in various ways - through the partly experiential nature of their training, through constant use of reflective supervision, through their own psychotherapy and, often, through having a spiritual path which involves meditation. In that way psychotherapists can keep open an inquiry and a dialogue which provides a foundation on which a psychotherapeutic encounter may be based.

I have shown that intersubjective psychotherapy provides a way forward for the provision of psychotherapy where there is a difference in culture. Intersubjective understanding is that *both* psychotherapist and client exist within the intersubjective field in which the encounter occurs. The work is

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They are often described as defensive or fearful or damaged. These responses remind me of

grounded in the knowledge that different sets of organising principles mark both psychotherapist and client and the psychotherapy process becomes an inquiry into similarity and difference which allows both therapist and client to develop a deeper understanding of their inter/subjectivity.

Part of the context in which I work includes the various organisations with which I am involved. In the next chapter I move on to explore this by particularly focussing on one of them. This helps me to better understand how the racialised environment impinges on this organisation and mitigates against a lack of diversity amongst its students, staff and clients. I show how I have worked to improve the diversity of this organisation.

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attitudes held by people who belong to dogmatic religious faiths.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WORK TOWARDS IMPROVING DIVERSITY WITHIN A PSYCHOTHERAPY ORGANISATION

And because we have too much information,
And no clear direction
Too many facts,
And not enough faith;
Too much confusion
And crave clear visions;
Too many fears,
And not enough light –
I whisper to myself modest maxims
As thought-friends for a new age
See clearly, think clearly.
Face pleasant and unpleasant truths;
Face reality.
Free the past.
Catch up with ourselves.
Never cease from upward striving.
We are better than we think.
Don't be afraid to love, or be loved
As within, so without
We owe life abundant happiness.

From *Mental Fight* by Ben Okri

Introduction

For about 12 years I have been working, not only in my own practice as a psychotherapist and supervisor, but also on a more public stage in various organisations, to try to increase diversity within the psychotherapy profession.

In this chapter I turn from my work as a psychotherapist with individuals to my work with psychotherapy organisations. As I showed in the last chapter, psychotherapy is a very 'white' profession so their organisations are imbued

with a 'white' culture. This organisation forms part of the complex web of institutions which keep white, western culture powerful. Three questions I have in relation to this work are:

- How does being white within a white organisation influence the psychotherapy work undertaken within it?
- How are non-white people affected by contact with 'white' psychotherapy organisations?
- What steps could be taken to ensure that 'white' psychotherapy organisations become more conscious of their whiteness, its impact on non-white people, and how that impact can be mitigated?

Although I have worked with several different psychotherapy organisations I have taken the one I have worked most intensively as a 'case study' to illustrate the points I wish to make. This organisation is the Bath Centre for Psychotherapy and Counselling (BCPC).

In approaching these questions I am aware of the difficulty of acting wisely in the challenging political field of encouraging diversity within organisations. I have found that, whilst it is easy to say and to feel that organisations benefit by the richness that diversity brings, it also brings the potential for conflict. Organisations themselves build up powerful cultures (Trompenaars 1993) which are just as jealously guarded as national ones. Peter Senge et al (1999:334) have pointed out that cultures do not change so much as evolve as new habits of thinking and acting gradually take hold. As cultural organising principles are held unconsciously, a consciously held desire to change may not be sufficiently effective. At BCPC, particularly as I am a central figure, I am central to the culture and this affects my ability to bring about changes in it as I will show below. Those outside the culture are in a better position to challenge me as 'the last one to know about the sea is a fish' (Hawkins 1995).

This part of my inquiry is situated within a 'third person' realm (Torbert 2001:256) in that it engages with wider systems than the personal or interpersonal. I did not set out to do this work with research in mind but retrospectively I have brought an action research 'mind' to bear on this data, some of which occurred before I undertook my inquiry. Some of the date accrued concurrently with it.

My stance to my activities, whether or not they occurred before the onset of my research project, has been inquiring and dialogic in nature and arises naturally from the kind of reflection inherent in psychotherapy practice (See chapter 3). My approach demonstrates that I have undertaken this work in a spirit of dialogue which, as I have explained and explored in Chapter 2, is the methodology which underlies all of this inquiry.

In this chapter I look at various aspects of my work within BCPC. I start with an area which is the most 'political' in that I explore how I have tried to influence structural and policy changes in the area of equal opportunities. In the following section of this chapter I discuss one specific area of equal opportunities that I have felt to be particularly important: the encouragement of diversity within the organisation – particularly racial diversity, as this seemed to me to be the area in which BCPC as well as other psychotherapy organisations were least diverse. It is also the area which most demonstrates the 'whiteness' of the organisation.

Just as I explored my own personal 'whiteness' in chapter 2, this chapter also shows that BCPC takes part in the institutionalisation of whiteness within our society. The very fact that it is almost unthinkable to describe BCPC as a 'white' organisation demonstrates the point. As I showed in chapter 2, whiteness tends not to be think-aboutable because it is apparently neutral (Rodriguez 1998:45). It is the ground from which other

things are seen. In asserting that whiteness has content (Rodriguez 1998:31), this concept is radically challenged: we can see more clearly how those who are not white are made into those who are 'different', particularly if the black people within it fall foul of unquestioned assumptions held within the organisation. BCPC can 'perform whiteness', as Rodrigez puts it (Rodriguez 1998:53), on whites and non-whites alike in these unquestioned assumptions. White culture is just taken as 'normal'.

Working towards equal opportunities in organisations

I first turn to the Equal Opportunities Committee as it is often the place in which issues of race and culture are discussed within organisations. If any part of the organisation is likely to be aware that the organisation is 'white' it is the equal opportunities committee and I have certainly found this to be so in the committees I have worked on, including that of BCPC. Although talk of the 'whiteness' of the organisation has not been explicitly articulated, it is the kind of idea that is likely to be accepted and reflected upon. The Equal Opportunities Committee is the channel through which most organisations direct their energies towards ensuring cultural diversity and inclusivity, but these very committees can be marginalised, just as black people are marginalised. So is the Equal Opportunities Committee like a 'black' person within an organisation – often marginalised, but when brought into the centre can feel as if they have been silenced? There are indicators that this was the case with the BCPC committee as I show below.

It is my experience that these committees are often on the edges of organisations, pushing the boundaries of what is acceptable and often a thorn in the sides of those in charge. Maybe equal opportunities ought to be at the heart of a healthy organisation – one that welcomes and encourages diversity – and every aspect of the organisation should be imbued with the spirit of these policies. Nevertheless, I wonder whether it is inevitable that equal opportunities are on the margins. If they are not then maybe there is

a danger of such policies becoming collusive with the status quo. Equal opportunities policies are about challenging those that are in the dominant group to ensure that those who are less dominant have the same chances. However well intentioned the management of an organisation, it is bound to represent the dominant group by its organisational position and therefore cannot be seen to be disinterested in putting these policies in place. Having explored and reflected on my experiences below, I will reflect further on where the Equal Opportunities Committee may best be placed within organisations. I wonder how far the marginalization of Equal Opportunities Committees is similar to, or a parallel with, the marginalization of 'black' people and therefore should be central, or is it, in fact, better placed at the margins in order to better stand back and comment on the organisation's arrangements? I will explore this question below having set out my experience of this work.

In 1997 I initiated the Equal Opportunities Committee of BCPC. I thought it was important that I was not the Chair because my leading role within the organisation might create a conflict of interest or, at least, affect my credibility as seriously wanting to challenge the organisation and myself within this leading role. We did some important work such as writing the equal opportunities policy, working with particular individuals who had special needs; looking at improving accessibility and generally challenging the different committees regarding their response to equal opportunities including the content of the curriculum and the teaching of it. For some years this was productive and at least partially successful in giving matters of cultural difference a higher profile in the organisation. Now the curriculum takes cultural difference into account at all stages of the training as a matter of course and an extra module called *Working with Difference* has been added.

Although these changes were significant and a step in the right direction, the basic culture is inevitably still 'white'. The vast majority of its members are white which unavoidably affected its basic assumptions. After three years on the committee I left because of pressure of work and a colleague joined the committee. However when she left for similar reasons the committee only lasted about a year and no longer meets. So did my and my colleague's leaving take the equal opportunities committee too far to the margins of the organisation? It seems that without the strong leadership of myself and my colleague the committee felt demoralized. However, a new initiative to start the committee is now in the air.

The work on this committee was interesting as I continually found myself to be both the challenger and challenged. My position as the powerful and symbolically 'white' person was present, as was the part of me that identified with those with less power – symbolically the 'black' person. The constant shifting of this position demonstrates both a need to be constantly dialogic, as it necessitated really listening to others' point of view, as well as a real engagement in cycles of action (in the organization) and reflection (in the committee meeting) so that grounded learning arose from this engagement. It also meant that listening to myself from each viewpoint could deepen my understanding of others' positions.

For example, I had to face the fact that the inadequacies of the BCPC curriculum were partly my doing. It was a lesson in non-defensiveness. I sometimes felt that the committee did not understand why we had designed a curriculum in the way that we had. For instance, the first year of the training was more experiential than theory-driven so I felt that challenging 'white' psychotherapy *theory* was not appropriate, but when I was able to be dialogic and confront my defensiveness I could see that they were right: whatever our reasons, students were not engaging with societal issues and the way that they impact on the psychotherapy relationship. However well

intentioned I was, BCPC was basically still a 'white' organisation and, as such, unlikely to attract 'black' students. I discovered that the more I was able to make my communications with others dialogic and non-defensive the more I have been able to make effective changes. For instance, the more undefensive I became on the equal opportunities committee the more understood the kinds of changes that needed to be made, such as changes to the curriculum.

Some of these changes in the organization happened at a 'staff weekend' (where the staff reflect on the curriculum). At this particular weekend, the way in which the course attends to cultural difference was discussed and various changes put in place. As the discussion deepened into dialogue – a real listening to each other - the staff could see that making changes of this sort was not a matter of unthinkingly obeying 'politically correct' dogma and they became more open to making changes. Now that we have a staff group that automatically think that difference in culture has an important influence on the work and should be included in the training.

Much more recently, when engaging in this inquiry, I decided to enter into another cycle of action and reflection. I wondered if, as those in power, such as myself, were ostensibly in favour of equal opportunities, it was harder for those on the edge to be appropriately challenging and this in itself was a block to change. I showed a previous draft of this writing to someone who, as a student, had been a committed member of the equal opportunities committee. She felt that the committee seemed to be taken more seriously by the organisation when my colleague and I were members but that generally it felt very marginal, 'despite all intentions to the contrary'. In relation to the question of whether or not the equal opportunities committee should be marginal or central she had this to say:

'Perhaps it has a need to be marginal. It almost feels to me like having one foot in the organisation and one foot out, being able to see two sides, holding both in some way - a bit like therapy process itself, I think.'
Email correspondence August 2004

This raises a question for me about whether there is a fine line to walk for equal opportunities committees. Do they flourish under oppressive regimes as members unite against it, which occurred in one organization? Or is the challenge from such committees stifled when management try to be on the margins as well as at the centre? As this dynamic is evident to me in various settings, I will return to this matter at the end of this chapter.

In the light of our experience it may have been worth considering the approach of Deborah Meyerson who has written a book about what she has termed 'tempered radicals' (Meyerson 2001). Meyerson advocates an approach which 'straddles trying to fit in and trying to be different' (Meyerson 2002:1). She is looking for ways in which individuals can make small 'stands' that can lead to something different. For instance, members of BCPC's equal opportunities committee could have found some examples of 'white' theory and sent them to relevant staff and the training committee for comment.

She says tempered radicals 'start small and then amplify.' They build 'narratives around their small wins' (Meyerson 2002:3). Meyerson points out that people may regard her approach as 'wimpy' (Meyerson 2002:1) but that it may be more effective than head-on clashes with management. Maybe an insistence on not being 'wimpy' can disguise a narcissistic desire to do something that is more apparently 'glorious' however ineffective and it could be an attempt to deal with personal, unresolved authority issues.

Maybe Meyerson's work shows a way through some of the dilemmas I have outlined above. An equal opportunities committee on the margins can gradually influence the organisation to make changes.

Encouraging Cultural Diversity within BCPC

As well as work on the equal opportunities committee, I spearheaded various attempts to encourage BCPC to be more culturally diverse. I wondered, though, if these changes were likely to be sufficiently radical and thoroughgoing enough to ensure that the organisation was not 'white'. The success of these venture was mixed, though in all cases there was, and is, much to learn. I explore below four different initiatives. These are:

1. Initiatives to encourage a greater number of black students
2. Initiatives to encourage more black staff members
3. The running of an introductory course which addresses intercultural issues. (This was put in place partly in order to achieve number one above.)
4. A project for providing free counselling and psychotherapy to asylum seekers and refugees.

Initiatives to encourage more black students into the organisation

Various attempts were made to encourage a more diverse student group. Only limited movement on this issue has occurred since it was instituted so my inquiry here is into the reasons for this disappointing outcome.

My first attempt was to write a leaflet encouraging applications from black people. It was sent to work places and organisations which were likely to have staff who may want to undertake counselling or psychotherapy training. In retrospect this seems a very naïve approach. From my perspective today it is not surprising that it produced no result at all. I now know from the experiences outlined below that 'cold calling' in this way is

likely to be unproductive. We needed to show the 'black community'[26] much more clearly that we were in earnest

The first breakthrough on our understanding of this followed contact with the Bath Racial Equality Council (BREC) (see below). As well as reiterating the need to make links with other organizations, they were sure that the prohibitive cost of the training was another factor that discouraged 'black' students. This led to us deciding to set up a scholarship fund for black students to address the often stated difficulty that black students are unable to afford the cost of training (Samuels 1993; Akinsete 2002). My sense that BREC was right about this was backed up by my own experience (at South West London College) that subsidised college courses were far more likely to have a culturally diverse student community.

We set up a committee to take this initiative forward and a member of BREC agreed to sit on it. He was very enthusiastic about the aims of our work and helped us to network with various organisations by making introductions. We finally acquired some funding and have managed to fund several students through the Introductory Course and one student was accepted to be funded through the main training though she had to leave as she had a sick young child and the pressure was too much for her. We had decided to pay for special supervision/mentoring for black students as we knew that there were many pressures on them as a result of being so much in the minority. I think, given her remarks to us, the black student who did come forward felt much better supported in BCPC than the previous one and other previous black students. Unfortunately, in spite of our encouragement, she did not take up the mentoring we offered, citing pressure of time. Since then we have funded several people for the

[26] Of course the 'black community' is not an entity. There are various different 'black and minority ethnic' populations in Bath and Bristol. Making contact with them for these purposes seemed easiest by approaching community associations and the Bath and Bristol Racial Equality Councils. This was one way of reaching people from several different groups.

Introductory Course. As I write another student has been offered a grant for the main training. With our last experience we have decided to be even more strenuous in encouraging the student to take up the mentoring. We can use our experience to back up this encouragement.

The few black students we have had on the training have found it very difficult, partly because of their isolation and partly because their perspective was not really understood. Yvonne Joseph, who was then a black student, now a graduate, made this comment about her time as a student at BCPC:

> 'As our histories were so diverse (colonial vs colonised) there were times when I did not feel understood. I longed for others of similar journeys with whom I could share these experiences, without first having to explain anything. In such situations the loneliness and isolation can be palpable, although you are surrounded by people.'
>
> *Written at my request on reading a draft of this chapter 25th June 2004*

This kind of feedback led those of us who run the black scholarship fund to insist on a black supervisor/mentor for any black student.

The scholarship fund has had some limited success but has not been the break-through we hoped for. My time and energy for fundraising has been overtaken by the Project for Asylum Seekers and Refugees (see below) and, as my colleague said (see below), no one with a passion for it has come forward since then to take on the scholarship fund though one colleague helps me to keep it ticking over.

I have come to understand that, in order to achieve a more diverse student group we need to work towards being less 'white' as an organisation. Even more importantly I have come to understand that an organisation does not become less 'white' by introducing more black people within it. This attitude

is 'tokenistic' in that it brings black people into the organisation to 'show' diversity. My inquiry into my own 'whiteness' has helped me to understand this thoroughly – not just intellectually. I can also see that we cannot just decide not to be 'white'. The most we can manage at present is to understand our own 'whiteness' and acknowledge its effects. I can now see that greater understanding of our organisation's 'whiteness' lead to:

- A curriculum which acknowledges this 'whiteness' and is open to other cultural assumptions and positions on psychotherapy theory
- A more dialogic stance to non-white students
- An engagement with non-white communities
- More black staff and clients
- An engagement with the difficulty of affording the course.

Initiatives to encourage 'black' staff members

As another, probably tokenistic, way of encouraging diversity, we agreed to advertise for a black staff member. As with the encouragememt of black students, we had had feedback from the 'black community,' such as from BREC, that 'black' people were more likely to attend the course if there was at least one black staff member. We did manage to make a good appointment but this person's circumstances changed and she was not able to work with us for long. Before she left she and I worked together on the introductory course called *Listening in a Multicultural Setting* (see below). After she had left we had a conversation, which I documented at the time, in which, amongst other things, I asked her about whether she experienced a power difference between us:

> 'Marilyn [my colleague] said that although this had been clear by what we had said in the first 'round' at the start of the course, she had not felt that the group regarded her as 'lesser' in any way and had not felt that I regarded her as such. We talked about how important it was for black people not to be hived off into

only teaching intercultural areas and she was pleased that BCPC had wanted her to teach on the ordinary course. Marilyn said that she was quite capable of noticing if she was being exploited and was very used to challenging such situations. She had done so on many occasions. Again I remarked on her strength in being able to do so. She laughed a lot and looked as if she was able to find life's challenges interesting and that they did not affect her basic sense of self.'

June 2001 and quoted in MSc/PhD Transfer paper September 2001

I asked her to read and comment on the account of our conversation and, in relation to the above quote, she wrote the following:

'I felt that the power dynamic between Judy and myself was complementary. Yes I was not a teacher or had qualifications to corroborate this in the same way as Judy. However my style is useful and significant. Judy is experienced in mainstream teaching and I in group facilitation and training, particularly in education. I feel we learn from each other. Some of that is explicit and the rest more subtle.'

24th August 2001 and quoted in MSc/PhD Transfer paper September 2001

It does seem from her account that this black trainer did not feel that BCPC had treated her badly in spite of the fears of the co-ordinator of training (see below) though I am aware that many subtle factors may have been brought to bear on this situation. This staff member has never experienced being in the 'racial' majority. Her leaving left me with an uneasy feeling that she may have stayed if the organisation had been less 'white'. This feels to me to be a subtle matter and not easily changed through policy making.

More recently a new black female staff member of Indian origin has been appointed to run the Introductory Course with a white male staff member. I discuss her experiences below. More people of 'minority ethnic groups' are

coming forward for the training (see below), It remains to be seen if this feeds through to the main training.

The introductory course: Listening in a Multicultural Setting

We set up an Introductory Course in the hope that it would encourage potential students into the training who may feel tentative about approaching us. The curriculum included basic counselling skills and theory but we put them all within an intercultural context so that the theories could be evaluated and understood as arising from a cultural context. Specific intercultural issues were included in their own right as well. We hoped that by weighting the curriculum in this way we could encourage a more diverse group of participants.

This has had some success in encouraging a more diverse student group, particularly recently, and also, more marginally, in encouraging a more diverse group into the main training. It is disappointing that in spite of some progress our membership diversity has not been greatly improved. Maybe we need to be patient as all these initiatives may be small factors creating change over time, as Meyerson (2001) would suggest.

When I stopped teaching the Introductory course I had the following conversation with my colleague, Whiz Collis. She thought the original intention had been 'watered down':

> **W.** My understanding is that the introductory course which started off as Listening Skills in a Multicultural Setting to encourage students from ethnic minority students to come forward, has now been rather watered down as it was carrying two purposes, one to introduce people to our training and the other to carry the multicultural aspect and I think the emphasis has changed. I think it is now more on introducing us, simply because we never had anyone from any of the minority ethnic groups that we wanted to encourage. [This was not in fact entirely true though I did not pick this up at the time]

J. It rather suggests an attitude that these matters are only interesting to minority groups.

W. And I don't think the attitude has changed but the emphasis has changed and we now call it a 'Listening Skills in a Multicultural Society' rather than a 'Multicultural Setting' as lots of people were not working in a multicultural setting and therefore thought they could not come on the intro course.

Transcribed tape of a conversation held on 12th February 2004

On reflection I can see that it is hard to maintain an attitude within the ethos of the organisation and British society at large, that difference in culture affects us all and not just those who are part of minority groups. Maybe this is an illustration of how we all partake in a field of consciousness rather than as isolated minds so that we cannot make great shifts in individuals without there being a shift in group consciousness. Trying to make changes in myself and other individuals is hard without a more cultural shift within BCPC as a whole, and it is difficult to make a shift in BCPC when society has a different ethos. On the other hand maybe it is small shifts in individuals that eventually make a change to cultural patterns of thought or 'organising principles' (Stolorow and Atwood 1992:55). It seems that there were subtle (not overt) pressures on me to make more of BCPC's agenda to design a more general course for the public. This was especially true as members of the public thought that a course that was slanted towards intercultural matters was not for them unless they worked in multicultural settings. In saying there were 'pressures on me', I am not meaning that I was pressurised to do something against my better judgment. I mean that, given the usual organising principles that ran through BCPC and myself, this is what emerged.

Since I recorded this conversation with Whiz (above) I have become the supervisor for this course which is now run by Ounkar Kaur, an Indian woman and Tony Voss, a white man, as I mentioned above. They have

been considering changes to the curriculum so that the intercultural aspects of the curriculum come out more clearly.

Intercultural issues between the two trainers have also usefully been brought to bear on the learning within the course concerning the meaning and use of eye contact. Ounkar told us that, within her culture, eye contact in not considered proper when in the company of men who are not of her family of origin, though she has learnt to conform with British mores in this regard. The white man is a Gestaltist. Gestalt therapy, with its focus on contact, commonly emphasises the importance of making eye contact, along with other psychotherapy and counselling approaches. Ounkar said that she had 'learned' to make eye contact with men through her western counselling training. This cultural difference came to their attention early on in the life of the course and led to an interesting intercultural conversation between the two of them and with me in supervision.

In an email correspondence Tony told me that, although Gestaltists may ask clients to experiment with making eye contact, especially in order to check out the reality of a fantasy about another group member, 'they may see that the other is looking at them with kindness and not judging them or threatening them as they had feared', for instance. He said that Gestalt Therapy always takes the 'field' into account which in this situation included a difference in culture. He suggested that 'in Asian culture a woman making eye contact with a man might be seen as inviting unwelcome attention. In these cases eye contact may not be conducive to good quality contact - indeed it might lead to quite the opposite'.

He sees the main point of the intercultural conversation as the fact that they had

'voiced, particularly in supervision, whether, in adopting eye contact between us, Ounkar had moved on to my ground more than I had on to hers. Had the 'white' expectations been dominant? How might I have adjusted my ways of contacting her more, so that we met more halfway?

As Ounkar says, this is an ongoing exploration. Perhaps it is a legitimate case of finding what works well for us in the current field. Maybe eye contact within the framework of our professional work together is useful (when co-facilitating a group for example it is very useful way of communicating), whereas in a different field (had we met socially elsewhere for example) it might not be so appropriate?'

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Discussing this between them and in bringing it to supervision, a fruitful dialogue about these differences developed and affected their relationship. Differences of perspective could be acknowledged both between them and with course members. Through this process of acknowledgement of difference, rigid ideas about appropriate and helpful behaviour could be loosened. The hunger for solutions was temporarily stayed.

This intercultural dialogue, the small increase in the diversity of the student body and the developing curriculum are all signs that some progress is being made in relaxing the rigid structure of this 'white' organisation. It seems to me that, if we are to build on this progress, we will need to remain interested in these kinds of intercultural dialogues and vigilant that we continue to have them. In saying this maybe I am building a narrative around a 'small win' as Meyerson suggests (2001), particularly by sharing this thought with the people concerned.

Project for Counselling and Psychotherapy with Refugees and Asylum Seekers: an initiative which encouraged a more diverse client group

The third of my projects for encouraging greater diversity in the client group of the organisation is a counselling and psychotherapy service for asylum seekers and refugees. In contrast, by building on past learning, this project has been extremely successful in this aim. I had asked the BCPC membership if they would like to join with me in trying to set up a project for this work and about fifteen people volunteered for the steering group. Through previous learning I had found that it was vital to network with others in the community if this was to be successful. Our project was immediately welcomed by all those we contacted. Maybe this is because we had learnt that we need to have something valuable to offer and that meets expressed need. The measures we decided upon were directly influenced by my inquiry: an emphasis on making good links with relevant agencies, to provide a free service and to ensure that counselors and psychotherapists receive very good quality support, training and supervision in an intersubjective, culturally sensitive approach. Specifically the measures we took were as follows:

1. Provision of free counselling and psychotherapy.
2. The making of links with relevant agencies such as Refugee Action, the Bristol Refugee Interagency Forum, The Haven (health care for asylum seekers) and the Interpreter Users Network.
3. The making of links with another local psychotherapy organisation, Bridge Foundation, a Bristol-based organisation that works with children and families, while we work with adult individuals.

4. The taking of advice from the national organisation with most experience of work in this area - the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture[27].
5. Application for funding. We found two funders after two years' work that have given us substantial grants: The Lloyds TSB Foundation and the Equator Trust. The William Cadbury Trust has given us a smaller grant as has The Norrie Trust. The latter gave us money for the training of interpreters and we share this with the Bridge Foundation.
6. The use of only senior trainees and qualified therapists to see asylum seekers and refugees as we felt that the complexity of working with people who have been traumatized warranted this measure.
7. Giving these counsellors and psychotherapists extra training and supervision as the main training did not focus sufficiently on the needs of this client group.

Having made these decisions we instituted weekend courses for therapists who also then attend monthly extra supervision/training if they have refugee or asylum seeker clients. Jeremy Woodcock who worked for many years at The Medical Foundation for the Care of the Victims of Torture became our trainer and supervisor. His experience and personal style provide a good holding presence for our work in this area and is invaluable to our learning.

The curriculum of the course includes the following:

- information about the typical experiences of asylum seekers, both in their country of origin and in this country;
- working with cultural difference;

[27] The Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture is a well-known and pioneering centre in London, not only for victims of torture, but also for the treatment of asylum seekers and

- working with trauma and
- working with interpreters.

Working with cultural difference and trauma are both also taught on the BCPC main training so this is not the course participants' first input on these subjects. The cultural diversity of the client groups of psychotherapists working in the West Country would normally be overwhelmingly white, English people, so the cultural diversity of the practice of the nineteen people working within this Service was greatly extended. All who work within it appreciate this fact as can be seen in the comments below.

We have also carried out two courses for interpreters. Work with interpreters has a steep learning curve but we are helped by our trainer who is very experienced in work with refugees and has encouraged us to see the interpreter, not as a sort of interpreting machine, but as another human being in the room with a role to play. Psychotherapists are not used to 'sharing' their clients with others and this brings a particular challenge. A member of the project wrote thoughtfully about this in the BCPC Newsletter. She disclosed both her own reactivity and hostility to the situation followed by a thoughtful response which revealed her ability to reflect on her own responses under stress. Because she has made so many interesting points I will quote her article in detail. She also showed how the process of reflecting affects her work. She wrote:

> I look at my client intensely while he is speaking: his bodily response, breathing and tone of voice tell me something about the volcano of anger dissimulated under the polite tone of voice. The translation of all this comes back to me via the interpreter in a rather short and unemotional sentence. What has been lost in translation? My paranoid schizoid part is triggered and I read a tacit

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refugees suffering with mental health problems.

complicity – if not collusion - between the interpreter and the client from which I feel excluded.

Later on in the session, the interpreter takes the initiative to ask my client something which will remain untranslated, I feel more and more like an observer while core issues are dealt with behind my back but, ironically, just in front of me. It feels very crowded and out of control. The interpreter seems to be leading the session which looks like a cross-examination. I think of Buber and I am filled with despair: how can I ever experience the healing of an I-Thou moment in this overcrowded setting? I have to process not only my own countertransference with the client but also the transference with the interpreter. What's more I bear in mind that some interpreters have themselves gone through devastating and damaging experiences.

The potential intimacy between two people has to make some space for the arrival of a third person. This makes me think of the arrival of a child in a couple who have to learn how to share responsibilities, care and nurture. Severe traumas like rape and torture are unbearable to expose and need the intimacy of the safe therapeutic space in order to be processed. How can this space include a third person who cannot be just a translator, a witness, an observer or a voyeur?

.....

After various experiences with interpreters, my thoughts have become more nuanced. I have now been working with one of the interpreters for nearly two years. I can only praise the working alliance we have built up together. This is why I have come to the conclusion that, despite something being inevitably lost in translation, something invaluable, precious and immensely supportive is gained from the triad. The shared mutual respect and understanding for the aims of the therapeutic alliance provides in the long run a safe environment akin to the traditional family of the client. This can help some asylum seekers to restore the meaning of their lives after the destructive and traumatic experiences they have been through (Gaveaux 2005).

I can identify with all those feelings and have reached a similar conclusion. When I fully accept that the interpreter is a valid part of the working alliance then what is lost in the intimacy between two people who speak the same language is replaced by a family-like situation in which the different relationships all have importance and meaning and the triad itself provides a holding space. I give an example of this work in the following chapter.

To help us with this work we belong to a Bristol Interpreter User's Forum which was set up by Refugee Action. On their request we developed a 'good practice' paper for interpreter's work with counsellors and psychotherapists (see appendix 6).

So in what ways has the project been successful in increasing the cultural diversity of BCPC? We have trained 23 people to do this work and 19 are presently active in the scheme. By October 2004 we had had 137[28] referrals and 87 of these have received counselling or psychotherapy. Thirty four were being seen at that time with 29 on the waiting list.

Of those 87 clients that we had seen by October 2004, 32 nationalities were represented with 36 of these coming from Somalia. This was by far the biggest group as it has the largest asylum seeker and refugee population in Bristol.

So what are the key factors that we have learnt through this work that have helped us make the project successful? It seems that involvement in the community, greater flexibility in the boundaries of the psychotherapy and therapist commitment are key. In particular we have:

[28] I give the figures for 2004 here as the full statistics for 2005 are not yet collated. However, I do know that the number of referrals to date, at the beginning of October 2005 is 214.

- learnt that it is important to become known in the community and work alongside other organisations if we are to have credibility with them.
- become central to an important multi-agency, Bristol-based initiative to set up a centre for refugees and asylum seekers called Holding Refugees in Mind. This followed a conference that we launched with the Bridge Foundation.
- made ourselves known to GPs, community organisations and asylum seekers groups and these are our main source of referrals.
- learnt that we need to be flexible and resilient. For instance we frequently have difficulties making initial contacts. Often clients do not know what to expect. Having been contacted, one of my clients thought she was going to see a town councilor, for instance. Frequently clients are so traumatised and disorientated by their experiences that it is hard for them to remember session times. We find, encouraged by our supervisor, that we sometimes have to walk the extra mile to help our clients attend the sessions, such as reminding them on the phone the day before. Sometimes this is difficult as their mobile phones might well not be charged or switched on.
- ensured that the work is rewarding for the therapists. Most of the counsellors and psychotherapists find this work absorbing and rewarding as well as difficult and challenging and are therefore highly committed (see below). We provide good quality support and supervision and there is no problem in persuading therapists to attend, although it is extra to their normal supervision. They find the work interesting and personally challenging and so feel the need for the extra support.

I asked the therapists working in the project to send me their comments about the work to help me with the writing of a report. All commented that

the clients seem to appreciate their sessions and benefit by them. Some said that the need to find a place where difficulties can be shared was of the utmost importance, particularly for those who have lost their families (see counsellor's comments below).

So does this mean that we can consider that psychotherapy is a useful and relevant option for distressed, disturbed and traumatized individuals who do not come from 'western' backgrounds? Often we find that asylum seeker clients would not normally consider sharing with strangers that which is usually private to the family. It does seem, however, as I said in chapter 6, that these are not normal times and sometimes counselling is their only resort if they are to find someone to listen to their distress and attempt to understand their disturbance. The psychotherapists and counsellors who work in the project are very aware that this form of intimacy with strangers is an unusual situation for many of these clients and try to be as sensitive and respectful as possible to this. We feel that it is a privilege to be trusted and we do not take it for granted (see remarks made by the therapists below). Often it takes time to build up trust and that is one reason why we have set no time limit to the number of sessions offered.

Usually these clients have suffered much more severe trauma than those that are native to this country. We are glad of the supervision as it helps us bear the painful nature of the work. We understand the client's need to speak of these memories gradually and in their own time. We understand the anger that frequently accompanies these revelations.

Those who work in the project report in supervision that clients seem to value the work but also that it is significant, though painful, for themselves. To illustrate the feeling among the therapist who undertake the work, here are examples from the survey I mentioned above:

'Working with Asylum Seekers and Refugees feels like a privilege. My normal work is with English speaking British clients with problems stemming from childhood. The unspeakable horrors and unbearable traumas that I am becoming witness to, as a client begins to trust me enough to share, are mainly from the atrocities perpetrated by the politically powerful onto innocent adults. My work is just a drop in the ocean of helping human misery, but it helps me to feel a part of a tide of healing to counteract the violence and inhumanity of war. My experience is that every single client is incredibly grateful, even when they are in the depths of unbearable depression and unable to imagine any improvement in their state of mind.'

'For one client I am currently seeing, the contact he has with me and the interpreter is the only contact he has all week, apart from when he goes to pray, because he is the sole occupant in the house provided by the Home Office, he speaks no English, is unable to read or write, and is too depressed to attend classes. So as part of the therapy, the interpreter and I are providing a lifeline of human communication. For the little I am able to give him, my client always wishes me prayers of good health and happiness for the rest of my life.'

'It is near impossible to appreciate the level of suffering of our clients, many of whom have lost their country, family members have been lost or killed, added to which their physical and mental health is in bad shape because of whatever abuse they have experienced and/or witnessed. I personally feel very grateful that we have the funding to provide this absolutely essential service.'

'I find the work hugely satisfying and am constantly being surprised by on the one hand the awfulness of what humans can do to each other and on the other the ability of some people to survive and retain their humanity.
I am certain that clients benefit. I have seen one who was feeling suicidal who after a few weeks was able to take up a work placement. Several have said they really appreciate being listened to and treated as if they matter. 1 client had been here long enough to get a job but collapsed into a depression after he heard his father had died and lost his job due to absenteeism. He only needed

4 sessions to have his story witnessed and his grief seen. He then stopped coming as he had found another job.'

'The work is very rewarding and necessary. People have had all kinds of terrible experiences and appreciate a safe place where they can talk about this and any other matters. I find that it gives me a little bit of an insight into other cultures and I am full of admiration for the people I see and how they are coping with what has happened (and continues to happen) to them.'

'I have one client who is 45, has his papers and is waiting for his family to join him. Works really hard, always punctual and sensitive though he has been horribly tortured. My other client is "18" though her lawyer suspects she may be much younger. Raped, brutalised, and has just been refused permission to stay! She finds it very hard to manage anything. Badly traumatised and has the most beautiful smile. I have to work very hard to see her. I ring her every week to remind her and her English is nonexistent. No Schooling in Somalia. She has to attend endless meetings in Croydon to see officials. I love the work but it does take a lot of time.'

Survey made in January 2004

Von Britzke found that interventions in therapeutic communities were most effective where the staff's own sense of involvement and enjoyment in the work was most intensely present (Von Britzke 2005). Crucially, she found that clients most valued the therapeutic groups which the staff most enjoyed. I wonder if the personal commitment felt by those working within our scheme is a significant factor in the effectiveness of the work with clients and is a contributory factor to the success of this venture. If this is the case it may be that there is an interaction between the intense need of the clients in extremis and the commitment of the therapists in response to this need that brings a sense of satisfaction in the work to all those involved.

Reflections on the Work to improve the Cultural Diversity of BCPC

When I started the work of trying to improve the diversity of our BCPC community I thought that we were likely to have a diverse client group if we had a more diverse staff, student and graduate group. However we have found, through the feedback we have had from community organisations, that the cost of our courses, which are lengthy and not subsidised, and the evident lack of diversity amongst our students and staff make BCPC seem not immediately welcoming. It is clearly a 'white' organisation, not only because its members are not diverse but because of its prevailing culture in which the awareness of its being rooted in 'whiteness' is not strongly obvious. For instance, when discussing child development on courses, western methods are discussed quite exclusively, in spite of our attempts to hold cultural assumptions in mind. We have started to look more widely at different cultural approaches to child rearing on the Introductory Course.

Although the slow tempo of our progress is discouraging it is evident to me that our policies are gradually bearing fruit. On the day I write this, for example, I received an application for a grant from our scholarship fund from an Asian woman who works with people who have been harassed for their non-white appearance.

However the work with asylum seekers has given us an opportunity to experience a much more diverse client group so that the overall client profile of BCPC has revolutionised over night. I am hoping that there might be a knock-on effect in the other direction, ie, towards more students and staff from 'ethic minorities', especially as this work gives us an *entrée* to immigrant and refugee groups within Bristol and some credibility with them. Very recently Ounkar Kaur, the new Indian staff member mentioned above, told me that our work with asylum seekers and refugees captured her interest in BCPC. In an email correspondence she said

'You are correct in saying that I have been drawn to BCPC due to their work with people from minority groups, particularly as I am a minority myself. I have felt inspired and it is encouraging when organisations like BCPC make the commitment they have with the work with asylum seekers.'

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and went on to say

'all the conversations that have taken place with Tony, Whiz , yourself and I and the students have been very beneficial. I agree with you when you conclude that the small increase in the diversity of the student body and the developing curriculum are all signs that some progress has been made.'

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It seems that there is some indication that my optimism is justified. So far our project has been very well received in the statutory and voluntary sector in Bristol. I have been asked to talk about our work at various meetings of community organisations and conferences.

Conclusion

Reflecting now on my work to improve the diversity of BCPC as an organisation, I can see how my understanding has changed. This change encompasses both what it means to be a diverse organisation and an understanding of how to achieve diversity. This shift in my understanding and practice has occurred in two ways:

1. through my dialogic engagement with cycles of action and reflection in my work within the organisation and
2. my general understanding of 'whiteness', gained in my inquiry process, has been brought to bear on my work within the organsisation.

A growing sense of my own 'whiteness', and in particular my growing understanding that 'whiteness' and racism are intersubjectively constituted and endemically held within 'white' culture has helped me to see and understand the 'whiteness' of BCPC.

As I showed in chapter 6 (see page 199), I became interested in the lack of diversity in psychotherapy organisations, and BCPC in particular, when I first joined the Intercultural Committee of the U. K. Council for Psychotherapy, UKCP [29], in 1996. In order to test the validity of my two statements above I returned to questions that I raised at the time. My responses to these questions give some idea of how far my understanding and my organisational practice have developed since then. My questions were as follows:

1. Can the psychotherapy profession, and BCPC in particular, become less homogeneous?
2. Is psychotherapy theory, and in particular that of BCPC, culturally specific to white, western society and therefore alienating to those who are 'black' and non-western?
3. How can I work towards helping the profession, and BCPC in particular, become more representative of our multicultural modern-day Britain?

In responding to these questions I will consider ways in which BCPC has changed or not changed and the factors which encouraged these changes, as well as making recommendations for the psychotherapy profession as a whole. Where changes have not been made I explore why this might be and make some suggestions about how changes might be made in the future.

[29] UKCP is a national umbrella body which accredits its organisational members and provides a register of psychotherapists. It is working towards statutory registration.

As regards the *first question*, from my present perspective, the homogenous nature of the field of psychotherapy seems very hard to tackle effectively. However, I feel strengthened in my view, through my work with asylum seekers and refugees, that dialogic, intersubjective psychotherapy does have a place in providing a service to people in many different cultures and across cultures. I have found, nevertheless, that BCPC as an institution, finds it difficult to change *its* culture sufficiently to make a significant contribution to the profession as a whole becoming more inclusive.

I had been aware of this, not just as someone who remonstrates with others to change but as someone who is right there within organisations and therefore part of the problem. This became apparent to me when I was a member of the BCPC equal opportunities committee and through subsequent reflections. When I say that I am part of the problem I am not saying that I am not doing my best. What I can see is that I have not yet taken the steps that are needed to really ensure inclusivity. Of course it would take more than just my input. At the same time I cannot see the problem as something just 'out there'. I cannot say 'if only others would.....'

I have found, through several cycles of action and reflection, that the most important thing we need to do is to make real links with different communities and have real dialogue with them (Buber 1965; Habermas 1984; Bohm 1996). This is tiring and uphill work, not funded and not easy. It takes us away from our known and comfortable world. But this needs to be done if we are to make any headway. As was pointed out by black community organisations, training needs to be cheaper and this can only really be achieved if it is publicly funded. This is very unlikely to happen soon, if at all, in the present political climate, and psychotherapy is not even

widely recognised as important within the National Health Service (Scott 2004).

The *second question,* 'Is psychotherapy theory, and in particular that of BCPC, culturally specific to white, western society and therefore alienating to those of who are 'black' and non-western?' is one I feel more positive about if a dialogic, intersubjective approach is used. Since starting this work I have had many more clients who are not part of western society who say they are benefiting, and seem to me to be benefiting, by the work (see previous chapter). An approach that does not use western values as a base line is essential if this is to be undertaken and further developed, however. Remaining constantly open to dialogue is important, particularly while 'white' people remain dominant globally.

The *third question* asks 'How can I work towards helping the profession, and BCPC in particular, become more representative of our multicultural modern-day Britain?' This question is key. The answer to it is important in considering whether or not my inquiry has enduring worth in the field beyond my own personal learning. Reflecting on this now I feel sure that my inquiry has indeed given me important new insights. I have come to the conclusion that, if white people within the psychotherapy profession are to ensure that it becomes more diverse, the following must be undertaken:

- A *conscious and sustained* effort to forge links with minority and immigrant groups and agencies that work with them. The Project for work with asylum seekers and refugees has been successful in large part because of making these links.
- The discovery of the *real* needs by making these links. Through our dialogues with these organisations, we have better understood the need for free or cheap and conveniently situated psychotherapy, for example.

- Work towards the public funding of psychotherapy training. Only in this way is training likely to be affordably priced.
- Ensure that training is culturally sensitive and that this sensitivity is evident in every aspect of theory and practice. We have found, through work with black staff and students, that this sensitivity needs to be in place if psychotherapy organisations are not to feel alien to black people
- Give up the notion that the white, western view is the base line from which others deviate.
- Really want to do this for the richness it brings to us personally and as a small contribution to a more peaceful world.

These guidelines arise from my inquiry and are important, but what seems to me to be most important is the constant non-defensive inquiring attitude and a real desire to want to make changes. When I consider the dilemma of whether the equal opportunities committee should be at the centre or the margins to be most effective in promoting organisational change towards greater diversity, I now hear this as a polarised choice. Maybe it could be in both places, or neither place, or one place at one time and one at another. Maybe there is no right place. Certainly no perfect place.

So what is important when considering the question of how to ensure that the whiteness of the psychotherapy profession is acknowledged and greater diversity really embraced? In my view it is the engagement, the inquiry and the dialogue and the genuine desire to make a difference. Polarised positions which reflect dualistic thinking are taken up because there is a fantasy that it is possible to 'get it right' and the answer is clear and simple. My experience is that this is not the case. From time to time a resting place is reached. We might think that we have found a solution but it only works for a little while before fresh challenges arise. Though this could feel wearing to me, it is also exciting; it is life, it is lively and alive. I am

inspired by the poem, *Mental Fight* that Ben Okri (1999) wrote for the millenium in which he says:

Only free people can make a free world.
Infect the world with your light.
Help fulfill the golden prophecies
Press forward the human genius.
Our future is greater than our past.
We are better than that.
We are greater than our despair.
The negative aspects of humanity
Are not the most real and authentic;
The most authentic thing about us
Is our capacity to create, to overcome,
To endure, to transform, to love,
And to be greater than our suffering.
We are best defined by the mystery
That we are still here, and can still rise
Upwards, still create better civilisations,
That we can face our raw realities,
And that we will survive
The greater despair
That the greater future might bring.

From *Mental Fight* by Ben Okri

CONCLUSION

For, after the gospels,
After the human and divine comedies,
After the one thousand and one nights,
After crime and punishment,
War and peace, pride and prejudice,
The sound and fury
Between good and evil
Being and nothingness
After the tempest, the trial,
And the wasteland,
After things have fallen apart,
After the hundred years of solitude,
And the remembrance of things past,
In the kingdom of this world,
We can still astonish the gods in humanity
And be the stuff of future legends,
If we but dare to be real,
And have the courage to see
That this is the time to dream
The best dream of them all.

From *Mental Fight* by Ben Okri

Having reached the end of my thesis I will bring the threads together and describe what I have learnt, what new insights have occurred to me and how and in what way the learning might continue. I also explore the ways in which my inquiry makes a contribution to an understanding of the racial identity of white people and, in particular, the effect that this understanding has on work with clients and organisations in the field of psychotherapy. In so doing I revisit the important questions with which I started my inquiry and show how these have changed between then and the present day. These changes lead me to a different way of understanding the concept of 'race' and to advocate new ways of bringing out these issues in psychotherapy practice and within psychotherapy organisations.

Reflections on my Personal Journey

The aspect of my life's journey that has led to this inquiry had several possible starting points. These could include my early childhood when my father instilled notions of social justice; my friendship with a Nigerian girl at school; my joining a group to discuss intercultural matters in my professional organisation or, possibly, the writing of my paper *A Step Towards Understanding Culture in Relation to Psychotherapy*, (Ryde 1997), which I submitted when I applied to enter the CARPP Doctoral programme.

I now feel that I have walked a few more steps further along the path but that there are many more to go and that maybe there is no ending point for a journey of this nature. During it I have re-set my compass somewhat so that I am now facing in a slightly different direction in that my own whiteness has come more into focus.

Although, as I show below, even in that early paper I was aware that I needed to focus on my own culture and from there relate to others, I was not as aware that my own whiteness was so important. This discovery revealed an intense sense of guilt and shame and I found that I was not the only white person to feel this.

The journey has been significant and life changing for me, not only because of what I discovered along the way, but because it has transformed the *way* I see myself within a racialised environment. I have understood that the organising principles that I have held in common with most white people lead me to see myself as 'neutral' within this environment. It is easier now for me to recognise this assumption when it comes into operation and step aside from it. Although my inquiry has helped to begin to change my organising principles, altering these deeply held 'blue prints' (Stolorow and Atwood 1992) is not easy and maybe it is only possible to recognise them and not be so driven by them. For example, an African client said that she

could not attend a session, although she very much wanted to come, because she had to take a member of her community to a hospital appointment. I was aware of an automatic response of wanting to challenge the way other people always come first for her and her own needs last. Then arose an awareness that my own cultural assumptions and organising principles were in operation. The work I have undertaken in my white inquiry and written about in Section 2 of this thesis, as well as on-going supervised work with asylum seekers and refugees, has led to a change in my organising principles, so that I am now more likely to think 'these are my assumptions' than 'this is the cultural position of African people'. Although this may seem to come to the same thing, I feel that it is different. I am more able to be aware of my own organising principles rather than see my own position as primary and others as deviating from it. This is clearly an on-going project and not something that finishes with the giving in of my thesis. Because the research methodology is personally experiential, like psychotherapy, it can help changes to happen in a more grounded and fundamental way than purely intellectual insights that might come out of more 'objective' positivistic research.

Reflections on my journey as a researcher

As I show above, this inquiry has had a profound effect on me, but so has the way I have carried out the research and it has led to changes in my personal epistemology. The experiential nature of the research was part of what initially attracted me to action research. This is congruent with my philosophy and the epistemology of the psychotherapy that I practice.

Having undertaken this inquiry, I now feel more strongly grounded in understanding the world to be participative and intersubjective in nature. I see that all that is manifest in this particularised[30] universe is held in a

[30] I have taken this word from the Sufi master, Ibn Arabi, who understood the world to be 'particularised' into manifest forms which are actually part of a the greater reality of the 'one'. Affifi,

complex web of relationship. This ontological position leads to an epistemology which sees knowledge as emergent and contingent on context and requires a methodology which finds approaches to explore the world that honours the complex ways in which we are all connected. Bringing this awareness to my work, particularly with asylum seeker clients, has strengthened my understanding of this position because the differences between us seem to underline the complexity of the connections between us as I show in chapter 6. This means that I am not tempted to make claims based on a quasi 'objective' way of knowing (Park 2001:82). This way of understanding has guided me throughout this inquiry and, insofar as it has underpinned it, this inquiry has been a valid one.

The journey of writing a thesis

Carrying out my inquiry in the world is only one part of the research process, however. The other is the writing of the thesis itself. In order to have integrity and validity, the writing of the thesis also needs to be guided by the same principles. The way I go about my inquiry and the way I write it up need to be congruent with each other. In particular this means that I do not claim anything in retrospect that involves others without including them in my thinking. As I have discussed in chapter 2, I have shown my drafts to the people whose thinking I have included in this thesis so that they can comment further and ask for parts to be changed or deleted or make further comments on the way in which I have thought about the work we have done together.

My work with clients has not been approached in quite the same way (see chapter 2). I have asked them if I can write about our work together in my thesis, explaining that I would disguise their identity, and all have given their

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A. E. (1998). The Twenty Nine Pages: An Introduction to Ibn'Arabi's Metaphysics of Unity: Extracts from the Mystical Philosophy of Muhyid Din Ibnul Arabi. Roxburgh, Bishara Publications.

permission. I have not made claims for how they feel but concentrated on my own responses to them. As I have discussed in chapter 2, detailed conversations about how I write up their work could be an impingement on the therapy.

Throughout I have wanted my inquiry to be for myself, my clients, my colleagues and for the wider profession and society. In action research terms this means engaging in first, second and third person research (Torbert 2001:150). It has been helpful to be able to think about my inquiry and its methodology in this way so that I can think rigorously about how my inquiry affects my life within these expanding circles of relationships. In practice I have also found that these apparently differentiated areas of relating (with myself, with colleagues, clients and friends and with the wider community) cannot be completely separated and tend to fade into each other.

Action research methodology requires that those who take part in the research are co-researchers rather than 'subjects' – it is 'research with' rather than 'research on' (Heron and Reason 2001:179) – but this can be problematic if you draw people into your study that have not explicitly contracted to be co-researchers. I have found that it is possible to ask people, without making them into 'subjects', to contribute their experience to my inquiry in a limited way without fully signing them up, as it were, to be my co-researchers. I have suggested that this might be called 'extended first person research' rather than second person research as I asked these others to help me in what is basically a first person inquiry. I might, for instance, ask them to let me know how they experience something (such as guilt about being white). This means that my inquiry includes the experience of others, both by contributing to my own first person inquiry and as co-researchers in a co-operative inquiry. In the same way, my experience

within groups and organisations has been part of my inquiry, even though they had not explicitly contracted to be. My stance has nevertheless been inquiring and dialogic and I have not made claims for others that they do not claim for themselves.

The Effect of Action Research on my Practice as a Psychotherapist

These action research concepts have been useful to me in considering my practice as a psychotherapist particularly because they have helped me to recognise more rigorously when I am making claims for myself and when I am spuriously making claims for others. I have equally found that ideas from psychotherapy have been useful for my inquiry as an action researcher. In particular I have found the idea that individuals and groups acquire a set of 'organising principles' which underlie the way they give meaning to their lives to be very helpful (Stolorow and Atwood 1992), as I explore below.

The organising principles of societal and personal life

From the position of having finished this inquiry, I can see that my view of racism and my place within it has gradually changed. From the muddied waters some fresh clarity has begun to emerge so that I am beginning to see the area of my study in a new way. In particular, it now seems to me that racism exists within the 'organising principles' or 'pre-reflective unconscious' (Stolorow and Atwood 1992:55) both of every individual and within what I call the 'organising principles' of one's culture.

Within this thesis, particularly in chapter 6, I have drawn on the work of intersubjectivist psychotherapists, Stolorow and Atwood et al who describe part of the mind they call the 'pre-reflective unconscious'. This is made up of our 'organising principles', so called because they refer to the structure rather than the content of the mind, and are thus unavailable to be directly reflected upon. We are not conscious of these principles, just as by living in

a house we are not normally conscious of the 'blueprint' that was drawn up when it was built. The blueprint can be referred to but not actually *experienced* in the way that we 'experience' *living* in the house. The values and assumptions that underlie our way of being in the world are arranged according to our organising principles and we live our life by them most of the time without questioning or even noticing them.

I am coming to find it helpful to understand cultures as well as individuals as being organised around a set of structured principles in the same way. These provide the way that assumptions and values are 'held'. It is within this scaffolding or web that racism shapes itself so that it is built into the fabric of society in a way that we are normally not cognizant of. The web is something we partake of as individuals as the culture shapes our ways of understanding the world. It passes, as it were, through us whilst also running through the culture. My perception of 'institutional racism' has been similar to this but I am beginning to understand racism as a total phenomenon in this way.

This idea about racism comes as part and parcel of no longer seeing human beings as having completely separate watertight identities, but recognizing that all is intrinsically connected through culture, (as I will show below). I have an image of a web or network of invisible lines that runs through society joining and connecting us. At places this web is thicker and more complex where culture is shared.. Maybe we would have to go to another universe to find someone to whom this web did not connect us at all.

The threesome of myself, an interpreter and an Arabic client comes to mind in illustration. The web connects the interpreter with the client. They belong to the same national culture so share many of the same basic assumptions and ways of approaching life. They are both Muslim and deeply religious

and they both have had to flee their country so share something of what that means to them. The interpreter and I are both professional women and work within a Primary Care Trust together. The threads of professionalism and care and respect for clients join us also with a certain professional cultural norm. The client and I are both women in our 50s who have married and had children and know the depth of feeling and contact that that brings us. The web joins us in this profound knowledge. We are all joined by our human experience and cultural knowledge though the web may be thicker in some places than others.

Since working more intensively with people who are not white or western I have never found myself talking with someone who is a complete mystery to me. Some point of connection can be found and often this feels a deep and significant connection. Sometimes the other's reality is harder for me to understand. My interpreter, maybe because of having different organising principles, finds it difficult to say certain things to my client. She cannot, for instance, refer to my client's husband as a 'husband'. She must refer to him as 'the father of your children'. I find that I am not quite clear why this is even though I have asked her. The subtleties of this are hard for me to understand. She also cannot refer to my client's body. I find this easier as it accords with some of my own organising principles. My mother could never refer to 'bodies', as they were intimate and embarrassing. Maybe I overlay my own situation on hers here so I thought the feeling was like my own in what Stolorow and Atwood (1992:103) would call an intersubjective conjunction, but the thread of connection is broken at this point. Although I think I understand this, maybe I have assumed something from my own experience.

To return to my work with my client, I feel that her bodily experience is important to talk about and ask the interpreter if she would mind making an exception. I am aware that we are both taking a big risk but I weigh it up

and think it is worth it. I remind myself that this client is not living in ordinary times so that extraordinary measures have to be taken. My interpreter agrees to interpret. I refer to the arthritis she has had since her daughter was murdered. I say 'I think the death of your daughter has entered your body and gives you pain in every cell of it'. The client cries and nods. My sense is that we have had a break through in our understanding of each other. I feel that the interpreter and I also reach a greater intimacy as we all participate in moments that feel painful but connecting. The client does not appear to notice that something has been infringed. Maybe this is because my understanding of her deep sorrow has been heard and that is more important. Another human being can approach something of what she feels. A connection along the web has been made.

When I started this work there seemed to be a tension between thinking that cultures are so different that they are beyond comprehension and thinking that if we are to work with people who are from a 'different' culture we must try our best to understand them. Neither of these positions seemed completely satisfying to me because different cultures did not seem to be as completely different as this dichotomy appears to imply but I also felt it was not right to insist on our similarities either. I now understand that the situation is extremely complex in a way that I have found hard to articulate and which I have attempted to describe in my account above. Our connection with each other between and within cultures is infinitely variable and cultures of different sorts overlap each other in fluid, complex and subtle ways. This understanding helps me to make significant connections with my clients who have culturally different backgrounds to myself in a way that does not deny the differences. Finding a connection in this way is basic to building trust. I find that it helps clients to allow themselves to be more vulnerable in my presence and share experiences which were traumatic and distressing.

Understanding Racism

Having used the idea of organising principles to help me to relate to individual clients where there is a difference in culture, I wonder if it can help me to understand racism as well? Maybe it can as, if we see racism as existing within the organising principles that run through society and individuals, it is not surprising that we find racism so difficult to eliminate. Getting rid of racism is not just a matter of finding it within us and expunging it. We cannot merely change our mind about it. Larger shifts in cultural consciousness need to occur. We can, though, contribute to bringing to awareness the underlying organising principles and help reveal them within the culture. For example, I would ask questions in my questionnaire on guilt and shame in relation to racism differently now (see chapter 5). I learnt through this example that racism is rooted in the generative substructure of our cultural consciousness, rather than as a form of 'false thinking' that could be dropped easily.

So how could the question be asked in the light of this consideration? At the time I was receiving the results I felt dissatisfied by the respondents' stress on personal racism and was not at that time able to articulate my difficulty well. I said in chapter 5:

> 'I am interested to see, for example that much less shame and guilt seems to be felt about endemic racism than personal racism. My own sense is that it is very easy to feel helpless, uninvolved and not responsible for underlying cultural assumptions in our own society. Of course these are very hard to change as an individual but my own sense is that we are all contributors and help to maintain it if we do not try to become conscious of our assumptions and do something about them.'

I had a sense that we all do have a personal connection to endemic racism but could not quite see how that worked but did feel that 'we are all

contributors and help to maintain it'. I have deepened my awareness since then by becoming mindful of the way in which white people have imposed their own organising principles globally by racialising the world and by seeing themselves as a superior 'race'. Although racism is largely condemned in contemporary western society it continues, deeply held, within our personal and cultural organising principles. Our very 'forgetting' of our culpability reveals just how embedded these ideas are, and how deeply most of us take for granted obvious 'reality'. This was the rock I tried to dislocate and perhaps all co-researchers have shifted it an inch.

Is psychotherapy so embedded in the white, western world that it has no relevance to those who are not part of that culture?

Having come to the way of understanding racism I outlined above, I wonder how far it throws a different light on one of the fundamental tenets of my original questions: Is psychotherapy so embedded in the white, western world that it has no relevance to those who are not part of that culture? I asked this question at the beginning of my inquiry and have been engaging with it ever since. It was an important question for my diploma and transfer papers[31]. In the light of my new way of understanding racism as embedded in the complex web of organising principles within individuals as well as multi-overlapping cultures how does the question now seem to me?

The use of the word 'embedded' implies a 'structuring in' to the culture in the way I am suggesting now but it does seem too absolute, as if white western culture were a complete monolith. It does not imply the complex web of interrelating cultures I am now envisaging. Maybe it implies something about white, western power though and in that sense it may seem like a monolith. Could there be a danger in my not remembering that cultures overlap – that this may be a way in which I as a white person

[31] Taken prior to my embarking on this doctoral thesis at the Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice

might 'perform' my whiteness? (Rodriguez 1998:53) As I showed in chapter 6, power difference, which is at the heart of the way that this 'performing' of whiteness originated, must have serious contorting effects on the normal flow of interconnectedness that needs to be acknowledged and reflected on in psychotherapy if race is really to be addressed. As psychotherapists we need to constantly remember this power difference and the white centredness that is taken for granted as a result of it and reflect upon it both in supervision and with the client.

However, when I work with asylum seekers the phrase 'we are not living in ordinary times' comes to me so that extraordinary measures sometimes need to be taken. Normal cultural supports are not present for people who live in exile. This includes support given by immediate and extended family, religious practices, healing rituals, community structures, the celebration of life transitions etc. Human emotional need for connection and recognition are addressed in these ways in all cultures including those in the West (Sheehy 1977:29) though in the west we might also go to a counsellor or psychotherapist to help us with emotional dis-ease. I believe, through my work with asylum seekers and refugees, that the need is the same in all cultures though the way of meeting it may be different. Any of these ordinary rituals of everyday life might provide for the deeply rooted human need to be heard, recognised and known.

One asylum seeker client tells me that it makes a difference to him that I am 'there'. He has told me things that he hasn't been able to talk to others about and my acceptance of him and desire to understand him mean a lot. Nevertheless, he also says that it would be nice if there was a sympathetic person living in the room next to him to whom he could open his heart whenever he felt like it. I notice this and wonder if he also needs to be angry with me for not being there for him all of the time. In my countertransference I am aware of feeling guilty for the small amount of time I am giving him.

Can I 'take' his anger that does not feel safe elsewhere? In this exiled environment he tells me that he fears and mistrusts those around him. These are not just English people but also the people he has been given as housemates by NASS (National Asylum Seeker Support – a government body that oversees the placement of asylum seekers in the community). He is gay and has been rejected by his family and community and expects rejection all round. He has found English society to be homophobic also. Although the Muslim community rejects him he asserts that God would not have created him this way if it was not 'meant'. He strongly believes in God's love for him and acceptance of him. He tells me that this knowledge sustains him beyond anything else and I feel that my complete acceptance of this is important too. A wide and engaging smile lights up his face when he talks of this.

I sometimes think that my non-western clients have a better 'feel' for what therapy is about than some of my 'western' clients and often have similar ideas about the usefulness or otherwise of psychotherapy. For instance a 'western' and a Sri Lankan client both think it would be best not to talk about emotional matters because it will make them feel worse. They are both men. None of my female 'non-western' clients have ever said that. One or two 'western' women have, but not many. Of course someone else might have found something different amongst their group of clients but this observation makes me wonder if psychotherapy is so very countercultural outside the west as it is sometimes painted to be.

Another experience, which occurred on a course for interpreters, also gave me food for thought. There were three white and English people in a group of ten. The two interpreters who left at coffee time were both white and English, saying they did not want to be caught up in anyone's emotional world. They considered it to be unprofessional as their job was just to interpret. Those that stayed for the rest of the course valued and

understood the inevitability of engaging with the emotional life of the clients under these circumstances which suggests an openness to a psychotherapeutic approach. (As I showed in chapter 6, psychotherapy is sometimes questioned as inappropriate for those who are not part of western culture.) I am not saying that English people are less likely to understand the value of psychotherapy and non-English people are more likely to do so. I am just saying that you cannot rely on English people to have a better understanding of the needs of people within a psychotherapy context than non-western people. The whole picture is much more complex than that.

My experiences since the start of this study have strengthened my belief that inquiring and respectful intersubjective psychotherapy can offer something that can run along the web that connects between and across cultures. In any case complex interrelationships between different cultural groups make the question of whether psychotherapy is suitable for non-western groups too simplistic to be answered with just yes or no. I have certainly found that it can be. Developing an ability to be in a state of on-going inquiry is more important than looking for clear cut answers as I show below.

Maintaining a dialogic and inquiring attitude in order to foster a continuing learning process

My inquiry process has led to significant new ways of understanding my own place within a complex racialised and multicultural world and a more grounded way of understanding how to be as a psychotherapist within it. However, in the introduction to this thesis I said that it was

> 'my intention that my research will spark off a continuing process in the organisations within which I work just as it is my intention that my personal learning process will continue. I will need not only to explore

whether this has happened or might happen, but also what I do, or could do, to foster it.'

Maybe this is the most important test of the usefulness of my research. I will now look at how far I have been able to foster a continuing process in myself and in others who have been touched by my inquiry.

I have found that to keep learning I need to maintain an inquiring attitude. This is an important and foundational idea in action research (Reason and Bradbury 2001) recommended by Judi Marshall in what she calls 'inquiry as life process' (Marshall 2001). By keeping open a space in her mind for 'inner and outer arcs of attention', she has experiences and then reflects upon them. She is not claiming here to total self-knowledge but of pushing areas of her learning forward.

These kinds of ideas are current in psychotherapy theorising as well. Winnicott's notion of playing within a 'potential space' is similar (Winnicott 1974). This 'play' space is part of what Winnicott calls 'transitional phenomena' (Winnicott 1974) which exist between the internal and external world and allows something new within our sense of self to emerge. A psychotherapist's exploration of their own responses (or 'countertransference') also exists within a space of this sort. This notion of a 'play space' allows anything to be held within it, however fanciful or violent or bizarre, as it has not yet entered external reality. It may be important also to play with these fantasies with a supervisor (Hawkins and Shohet 2000:79). The psychotherapist might find that they are thinking[32] something that is, under normal circumstances, completely unacceptable like 'I want to pin this client up against a wall and shoot him'. Not a pretty thought and not one to be conveyed to the client undigested! The psychotherapist might

[32] 'Finding that you are thinking' something is different to having a 'thought'. It is like catching the unconscious on the wing.

then think 'what on earth is that all about? Something is happening that draws me to feeling murderous and in that particular way! Do I feel under threat? Would I enjoy feeling sadistic? Maybe an old experience of mine is being restimulated. Maybe I am picking up a fear or desire of the clients'.' She might then put it to one side until something else is said which seems to make it clearer. My point here is that the therapist does not push away an unacceptable thought but puts it within an orbit of 'playing' so that it can be thought about safely and trusts that something can be learnt through it.

In a similar way I can allow myself to be aware of my thoughts and feelings that arise in my inquiry and reflect upon them. The co-operative inquiry group provided such a space.

During the course of this process, my consciousness about being 'white' changed. How did this happen? In considering this question I am engaging in another turn of the inquiry process. I find that my immersion in three interrelated inquiry processes seem to have helped to bring about a change in consciousness.

The three processes are

1. An immersion in the literature.
2. Allowing difficult and painful thoughts into consciousness.
3. Learning through the co-operative inquiry.

Firstly, I immersed myself in the literature, allowing it to filter through beyond the intellectual knowing to something deeper (Moustakis 1990). This meant that I reflected on my own experience in relation to the reading and sometimes helped this process by writing about it as well. For example on reading White Reign (Kincheloe, Steinberg et al. 1998) I wrote:

> A key part of White Reign is that it advocates an understanding of white oppression but wishes to show how a positive white identity can be encouraged. It stresses that white guilt is unnecessary and even harmful. I have sat and thought about this for some time as it feels like a bit of a cop out to me. I wonder whether it misses out an uncomfortable phase of really taking on board what white privilege has meant.
>
> *Notes made in April 2004*

I show here, through my use of reflective writing (Winter 1999), how her writing points up my own behaviour and puts me in touch with my difficult feelings. Reflecting on these contributes to my learning at several levels by allowing the concept in, not just to my intellect, but to my feeling self as well.

Although this inquiry process which involved my reading was a first person inquiry, it also has a third person element in that I was engaging with the ideas of people 'out there'.

Secondly, I encouraged myself to allow difficult and painful thoughts into my consciousness so that they could be processed and learnt from. These included everyday experiences such as getting it 'wrong' in the area of equal opportunities and the ways in which I benefit by being white. The structure provided by CARPP provided a place where I could hold painful thoughts in my mind so that I could learn from them.

For instance, I sent a letter in April 1999 (a few months after starting at CARPP) to a member of my supervision group. It illustrates some of the painful feelings I had, along with attempts to process them:

'As for my research, it is not very surprising that you didn't understand as I don't fully understand it myself yet! But to be less cryptic about it, I have been struck recently by the painful and vulnerable feelings that I and others feel when matters of 'equal opportunities' come up. For example:

1. Our (BCPC – my training org's) equal opportunities committee told me that they wanted me to have a particular paper introduced to students on Stage 1. Now it is not my style or practice to 'tell' our staff how or what to teach on the curriculum, though I might negotiate with them if I felt strongly about something and the ultimate authority if there is a clash is the training committee. I felt caught between all these in a painful way and in a way I wouldn't feel on any other topic. I did eventually say 'it is isn't my way to insist, but I will suggest it.' In the event the equal ops committee were happy with that and the staff of the course thought it was a good idea, but what interests me was my process in it all.
2. The intercultural committee of UKCP have written a reading list with accompanying notes on different areas of working with difference. I was one of the co-authors. BCPC's equal ops committee poured scorn on what it said as woolly and liberal. On the surface I was open and undefensive and welcomed their idea of encouraging debate by using it in our Newsletter, but in fact I felt attacked and rubbished.
3. When the Race and Culture group presented to the AGM [of UKCP] they said they did not want to have questions until the end because they couldn't cope with racist remarks while presenting. They thought it would be inevitable that there would be racist remarks, even if they were not intended as such, and they would be too painful to have to field whilst having to be 'in charge'. (It was agreed that I would chair the plenary later.)
4. The process of the UKCP in trying to implement equal opportunities monitoring of access to training has been horrendous and still is in spite of all involved saying that they are for it. After several years of negotiation it was agreed last AGM, though how it was to be done had not been worked out.'

I am struck by how raw the feelings were about being 'in the wrong'. Maybe somewhere I was aware that I was fundamentally 'in the wrong' and could not bear that. On reflection I think that my decision to focus on my own racial identity grew out of my need to 'grasp the nettle' of this - of what could

be thought of as the source of the pain – my guilt and shame about being in a culturally more powerful position. In the letter quoted above I am struck by my desire to act with integrity but feeling that that was difficult or even impossible. Maybe, as I suggest at the end of chapter 4, this was a move from merely 'finding out' about other cultures to really allowing in an embodied sense of guilt-shame and taking the truth of that into my life. I am interested to see that my sense of feeling guilty and ashamed is no longer as current for me or as painful, though it can be re-activated from time to time. More often I can now regard this feeling as a message to myself that something is amiss. Maybe this takes me closer to the 'White Ego Identity Status' of 'Autonomy' in the scale developed by Helms (1995: see also chapter 3).

Reflecting on that now I feel that I know myself within my racial position more clearly. I can see that all I can do is to learn to respond with more and more integrity within a racialised and multicultural environment. I find that I use the word 'racial' more freely. I do not think this is because I see the term as having any more legitimacy than I did, but that it is a construct that influences social relationships and so within that constructed field I am as much a 'person-of-race' as any other.

The *Third* area of my learning was through a co-operative inquiry group that I set up to focus on and learn about the experience of being white. This meant that others collaborated with me directly and helped me to keep this focus because of their shared interest. Some of what I learnt in the second area above was considerably helped within the co-operative inquiry group as it was a safe space, not only to allow difficult thoughts and feelings into my consciousness, but to share them with others who would help me to make sense of them. They were admissible without being colluded with. It was a place where I could bring my ideas and preoccupations and where others could bring theirs. Others' preoccupations sparked ones that I held

just out of awareness. The group became a container for my inquiry. In a world where whiteness is something that is not normally thought of as a legitimate object of study, it became a place where I had fellow travellers.

Reflections on the extent of my learning

Having spent so much time inquiring, both on my own and with others, how do I know that my consciousness about being white has changed? An incident occurred when I was engaged with others in constructing a panel of speakers for the conference *War, Terrorism, Cultural Inequality - and Psychotherapy* for an organisation called Psychotherapists and Counsellors for Social Responsibility. Others wanted only to have panellists who were from 'minority ethnic groups' while I insisted on a white panellist as well. I felt that my colleagues' position revealed a stance of seeing 'white' culture as the 'basic' one from which others 'interestingly' deviated. It was a stance that implied: 'we who hold the normal ground would like to hear from you people of other cultures.' Even thinking: 'You might be able to help us with this' is seeing the white, western view as the basic one. I am quite sure that I would have been blind to this implication before I undertook this inquiry. I would have thought, like my colleagues, how interesting it would be to have the opinions of people from 'minority ethnic groups'.

As I write the difference feels huge on the one hand and very subtle on the other so that it is hard to convey the enormity of the difference in attitude that I experience. I was struck by the way that this insight came to me naturally. There was a 'feeling' that something was not right rather than a response to a politically correct dogma. Maybe this demonstrated a shift in

my 'organising principles' (Stolorow and Atwood 1992:55). My experience of trying to put over my point of view also reminds me of the frustrations often expressed by people who are of the minority culture. Something is 'wrong' but it cannot be conveyed. Maybe when this happens there are not shared cultural organising principles on which to structure the thought and to create consensus.

The contribution of this thesis to the fields of psychotherapy and cultural awareness

As I have shown above, my thesis has had a fundamental effect on my sense of self and on my practice as a psychotherapist. I have also shown, particularly in chapters 6 and 7 that colleagues have been affected and changed by sharing with me in my inquiry. The following are ways in which I made a contribution to the field:

Intersubjectivity theory applied to working across cultures

I am indebted to those from the Institute for Contemporary Psychoanalysis (particularly Robert Stolorow, George Atwood, Bernard Brandschaft , Donna Orange and Lynne Jacobs), whose work has in recent years inspired my approach to psychotherapy. I am unaware, however, that any of these writers, except for Jacobs, have specifically applied their ideas to working across difference in culture. I have nevertheless found this approach particularly useful in helping me to find a way forward in this regard. It not only makes sense to me in theory; I have found it helpful in practice. My work the asylum seeker whose child had been murdered which was described earlier in this chapter illustrates this point.

In recommending this approach when working across cultures, I am recommending an experiential immersion rather than just a cognitive learning of theories. I have found that the more I have been able to *feel* a

sense of myself and my client within our separate and shared contexts, the more real human contact is made.

Racism

As shown above, although this thesis is primarily about my practice as a white psychotherapist, I have also contributed in a more general way to thinking about racism. By putting my whiteness at the centre of the inquiry I have been able to see the way that racism is embedded in the organising principles of individuals, cultures and societies and is not just 'housed' in individuals, except insofar as certain individuals may have organising principles which lead them more certainly to racist thoughts and attitudes. This has led me to conclude that racism is more properly 'institutional' in character. Maybe it is unhelpful to think of racism as a 'personal' phenomenon at all as this leads to the idea that racism can be 'stamped out' by simply 'getting rid of' racist people or prescribing 'politically correct' language/behaviour.

This way of understanding Racism could have important implications for public bodies which try to tackle institutional racism, such as the police, or, indeed, the psychotherapy profession.

Dialogue as a methodology for working across cultures

As I have shown (see particularly chapter 2), dialogue has similarities to action inquiry methodology and intersubjective psychotherapy. All these methods stress the importance of questioning one's own assumptions and meeting the other in an open way so that 'the truth' may be discovered between the two. As I show in chapter 1, dialogue as a methodology for meaningful conversations across difference, could be extremely important in a world where politicians, amongst others, reiterate entrenched positions

rather than start from a position of not knowing where 'questions are more interesting than answers' (Hawkins 2003). Whilst several authors have written about dialogue in a way that I have found very helpful, I am unaware of any authors specifically recommending this in the area of racial difference.

Awareness of whiteness in the field of psychotherapy

As I have shown in chapter 3, I have only found three authors who have specifically written about being white as a psychotherapist or counsellor (Jacobs 2000; Tuckwell 2002; Lago 2005)[33]. This thesis therefore contributes to this small number and I am indebted to the other three for helping me to think about the issues involved. All of these authors write about the prevalence of a sense of guilt in white people about their privileges. My contribution has been to extend the thinking on this, particularly by showing how awareness of guilt and shame may alert white people to what is amiss in their dealing with those who are not white or western.

Back to my Roots

In completing my thesis I want to acknowledge my dialogic roots in the soil of BCPC and the support I have received throughout my inquiry. Serendipitously I discovered this diary item just as I reach this point in the writing. It was written one month before starting my research at Bath University:

> '2ND DECEMBER 1998
> Last night we had a BCPC staff meeting. For some time I have been wanting to bring up the issue of equal opportunities training. I have felt

[33] Others such as Robert Altman Altman, N. (2003). "How White People Suffer from Racism." Psychotherapy and Politics International 1(2): 93 - 106.

very nervous about this as I expected that the idea would have been disparaged as 'politically correct' and over simplistic. That people would think I wanted to bring in the 'thought police' however much I protested that this was not the case. I would end up feeling misunderstood in a rather embarrassing way. That I was stupid and easily persuaded by those who took the moral high ground.

Having said this I think there is some truth in it. I think I am easily swayed if the other person seems to have high principles. I don't like to be on the 'low' ground and I equally don't like to be seen as stupid. No wonder I was nervous!

In the event things happened in both directions. The two male staff members had the sort of reaction I feared but all the women in their different ways backed the idea to the extent that we could find enough emotional space to really look at the way our 'liberal' attitudes blind us to how minorities feel and experience us and our culture. There was particular mention of a black student on Stage 2 who [one staff member] felt had been on the receiving end of a lot of racism from both staff and students (and she was including herself in that). There was also talk of what [one staff member] felt about being the only lesbian person in the group.

I suggested we might get some people in to help us with this and I felt there was some resistance to this idea but a willingness to explore it. By the end of the discussion I felt that [the two men] were on board with it, as it seemed an exciting and challenging thing to do into rather than introduce the thought police.

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have considered the issue of whiteness in psychotherapy but not about being white *as* a

This morning I got up early and have had an exciting idea. It is to use this as my research subject. All sorts of possibilities occur to me:

- the staff group could become an action research group.
- the whole of BCPC could become an action research group!
- The whole of the UKCP could become an action research group! - no that is megalomania.
- the training could be transformed by a new awareness of what it is to work with difference
- I could go off and look at other trainings,
- go abroad and look at trainings in America, South America, Australia etc
- I could look at how psychotherapy which embraces phenomenology and intersubjectivity can contribute to ways of working interculturally
- I can look at how training for intercultural awareness can best be done
- I can look at the culture of psychotherapy and how it is so un-multicultural and how that trend might be reversed.

I feel very excited by having the staff group behind me in this. I have a sense that how I felt yesterday about introducing the idea of equal ops training was how people in minorities feel and my present elation is about breaking through that. It almost feels as if anything is possible!

No doubt I will go through a lot of other feeling before this project is finished.'

How true that last statement is! Nevertheless, some of what I had hoped for has been achieved. The staff have begun to share my concerns and difference in culture is very gradually being brought in to the curriculum although there are reversals and still some way to go.

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therapist.

In the end two new factors have been contributed to my learning in a way that I had not anticipated. One is my work with asylum seekers at BCPC that was not even a gleam in the eye in 1998. I have had real experiences of difference and connection with these clients. The other is the most fundamental, however. It is the learning that has come to me through understanding my own racial identity. Everything else has sprung from that and that is what I most did not understand when I wrote the list above.

Final thoughts

It now seems to me that there is unlikely to be more than tinkering on the edges of progress towards real integration of all our populations in the west unless white, westerners can really 'see' a racialised environment in which white people are just one part. In my view this is a necessary stage in 'race' becoming an unnecessary construct and assigned to history.

For me the starting place is my own continuing inquiry which includes my own personal exploration but also my work within organisations. My experiences to date have led me on to enough firm ground to advocate action for others. I recommend to psychotherapy training bodies that they:

- Find ways throughout the formal training and in specially designed modules to encourage an understanding in students of the racialised environment in which they live and their own place within it.
- Encourage a sensitivity in supervisors to this issue so that it is constantly seen and explored in their work with clients in supervision. This has implications for the training of supervisors.
- Encourage a sensitivity in psychotherapists to this issue who work with students so that a deep, embodied understanding of ourselves in a racialised environment is really felt and known.

Psychotherapy institutions exist within a wider environment and will affect and be affected by others. To make a change there needs to be a movement in both directions – from the widest institutions like governments and training institutions who make policies, to individuals and their personal explorations. Both can feed into and support the other to provide a virtuous rather than a vicious cycle.

This is not a straightforward matter where the policies of institutions alone will make the difference. Hearts need to change as well as minds. White people will continue to dominate the world in a way that will inevitably lead to conflict unless we are able to take on the difficult and painful work of clearly seeing the damage done by our domination and be prepared to do something about it.

No doubt this is an arduous and difficult work for, as Ben Okri (Okri 1999) says:

> The sooner we admit our crimes to others,
> To other peoples, creeds, genders, species,
> The better and lighter the human
> Future will be.
> The more we deny, the greater will be the horrors
> And vengeances of time
> That wait silently in the wings
> Of the bloody drama of our future
>
> From *Mental Fight* by Ben Okri

However, he is also optimistic about the ability of the human race to continue in the face of great difficulties. To those who feel exhausted by the difficulties he says:

They who are exhausted have lost
The greater picture,
The greater perspective.
They are trapped in their own labyrinth,
Their lovelessness, selfishness.
For those with limited dreams,
There is chaos to come.
Disintegration. Nightmares.

And he goes on to say:

Exhaustion is a mental thing,
The absence of a spiritual viewpoint,
A universal vision,
A sense of new journeys,
Higher discoveries

From *Mental Fight* by Ben Okri

I take hope from this, both to find new energy for myself, but also to remind myself that I am part of a wider pool of humanity and my thoughts are not just my own. As Bohm (Bohm 1996:51) says, the

> 'deep structure of thought is what is common and this is what we have to get at. We will have to come to see that the content of thought and the deep structure are not really separate, because the way we think about thought has an effect on its structure. If we think, for example, that thought is coming from *me* individually, this will affect how thought works, so we have to look at both content and structure.'

I cannot advocate then that institutions just should come up with better policies or that individuals change their consciousness. Both work together in a synergistic way. Thought is in the culture and we are affected by it and

affect it just as drops of water make a pool and a pool is full of drops of water.

I have found, through my inquiry, ways in which supporting frameworks bring together the personal, interpersonal, group and societal, particularly through understanding the ways that 'organising principles' run through individuals and groups to provide the ways in which thought is structured within, through and around us. This feels to me to be an important shift in perspective that could lead to less attachment to our own narcissistic needs and a real acknowledgement of our membership of the human family and the wider world.

As Ben Okri says 'Maybe we can still astonish the gods.'

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